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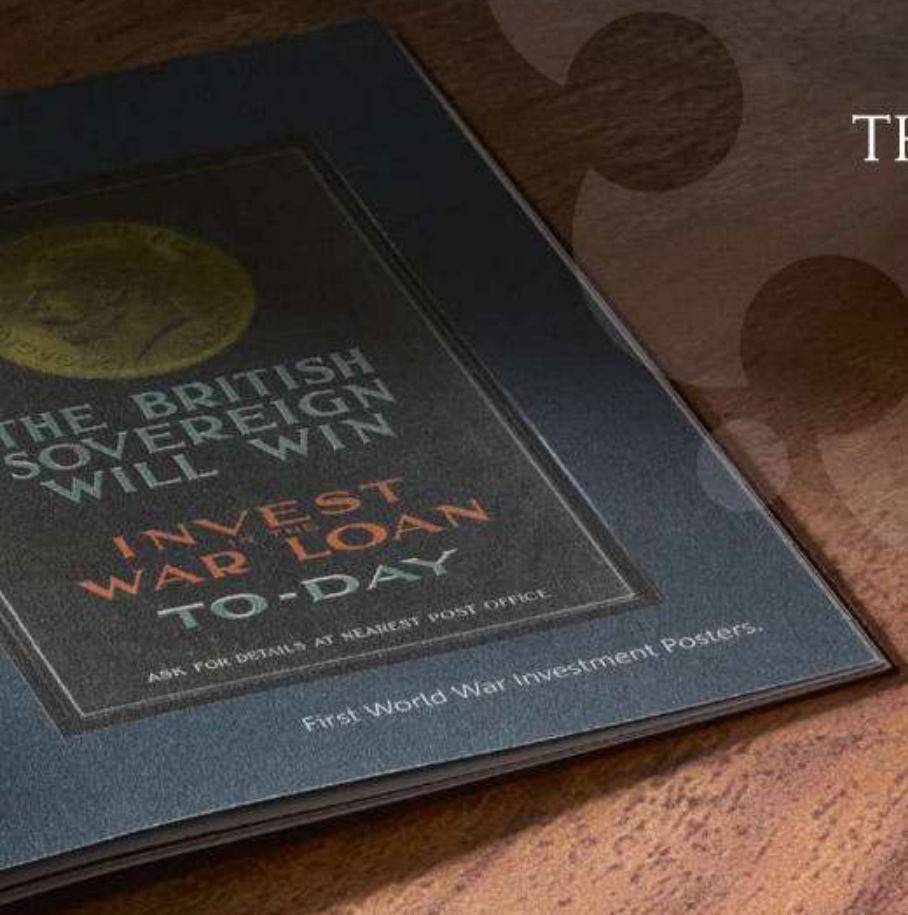
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NOVEMBER 2020

It is one of the most celebrated tales of ancient history. A vast Persian army is pitted against 300 Spartan warriors guarding a narrow pass, which they defend with every last drop of blood – inspiring their fellow Greeks to ultimate victory. Thanks in particular to the film *300*, few today can be unaware of **the legend of Thermopylae**, but how far does it accord to the reality? As the world marks the 2,500th anniversary of the battle, Andrew Bayliss looks afresh at Sparta's finest hour in our cover feature on page 20.

Myths of a very different kind are the focus of this month's *Think Piece*, from Richard J Evans. His new book explores **the conspiracy theories that swirl around the Third Reich**, and in his article he highlights some of the most pervasive – from the burning of the Reichstag to Hitler's supposed escape to Argentina – as he seeks to explain the popular desire to create an alternative reality around Nazi Germany. You'll find this on page 59.

Finally, debates have been raging in recent weeks about how we should treat the refugees who are arriving on our shores. A rather different version of these events took place in 1914, when **tens of thousands of Belgians sought shelter in Britain during the First World War**. As Alison S Fell reveals in her piece on the Belgian refugees, the new arrivals were at first welcomed with enthusiasm, but some disillusionment set in as the war dragged on. Turn to page 28 to discover more. I hope you enjoy the issue.

Rob Attar
Editor

THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

Richard J Evans
Since I wrote a trilogy on the history of Nazi Germany a couple of decades ago, I've noticed more and more conspiracy theories about Hitler and the Nazis have come into circulation, so I thought I'd investigate some of them in depth.
Richard probes influential Nazi conspiracy theories **on page 59**

Angelina Osborne
The most appealing thing about researching black Britons in history is bringing to light the lives of individuals who disrupt the narrative as it has been presented to us for many years.
Angelina chronicles the lives of seven trailblazing black people who shaped British history **on page 66**

Neil Oliver
As William Faulkner said, the past is never dead. It's still alive. Even the distant past is still very much alive. I have found opening my mind up to the ways that ancient peoples thought about and understood the universe very helpful.
Neil considers how the ancient past can help us make sense of our present **on page 74**

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COVER IMAGES: STATUE OF LEONIDAS AT THE MEMORIAL TO THE 300 SPARTANS, THERMOPYLAE, PTHIOTIS, GREECE – GEORGE PLAKIDES. BACKGROUND: ALAMY. MEDIEVAL ASTRONOMER: BRIDGEMAN. THIS PAGE: STEVE SAYERS/CHARLIE HOPKINSON/GETTY IMAGES

CONTENTS

NOVEMBER 2020

FEATURES

20 Sparta's last stand
Did 300 warriors really defy a mighty Persian army in 480 BC? Andrew Bayliss investigates

28 Belgian refugees
Alison S Fell relates the experiences of the thousands of Belgians who fled to Britain during the First World War

35 Medieval genius
Seb Falk argues that the Middle Ages were a hotbed of scientific ingenuity

42 Sherlock Holmes in skirts
Elizabeth Evens on the pioneering policewomen who snared criminals in turn-of-the-century New York

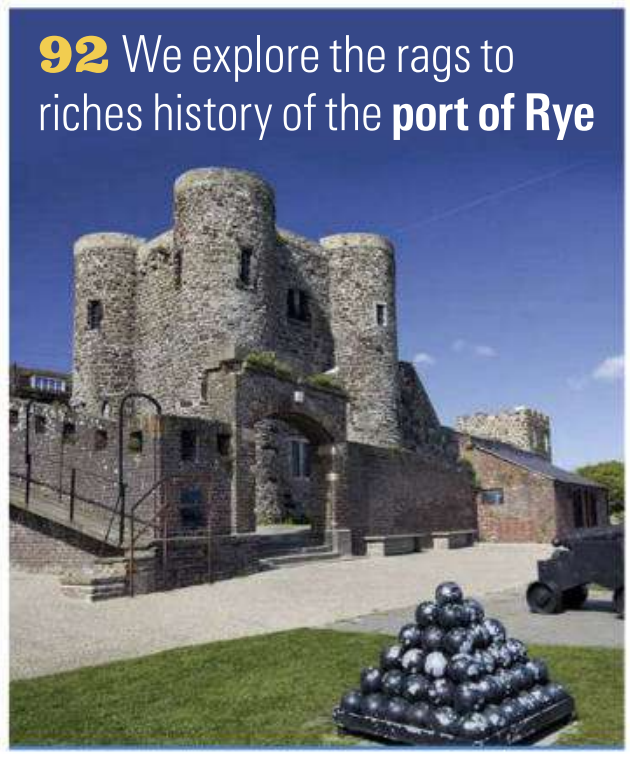
50 Europe's nightmare
Michael Rowe argues that the Franco-Prussian War had an immense impact on the modern world

59 Fake news and Nazis
Richard J Evans considers what Nazi conspiracy theories can tell us about the Third Reich

66 Black trailblazers
Angelina Osborne profiles seven black pioneers whose contributions to British history deserve a wider hearing

Discover why Hitler's Germany has spawned a plethora of conspiracy theories, on page 59

42 How the **world's first policewomen** extended the long arm of the law in New York



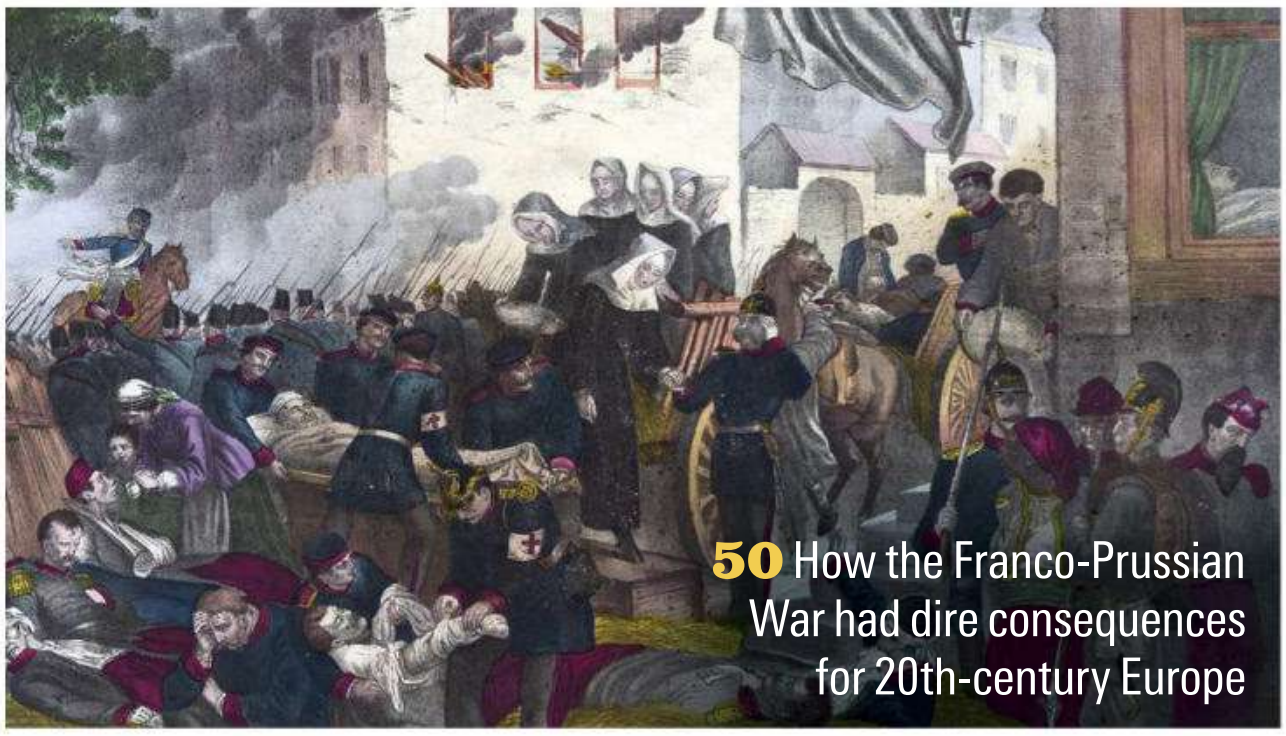
92 We explore the rags to riches history of the **port of Rye**

28 The plight of the **Belgians who fled to Britain** in 1914

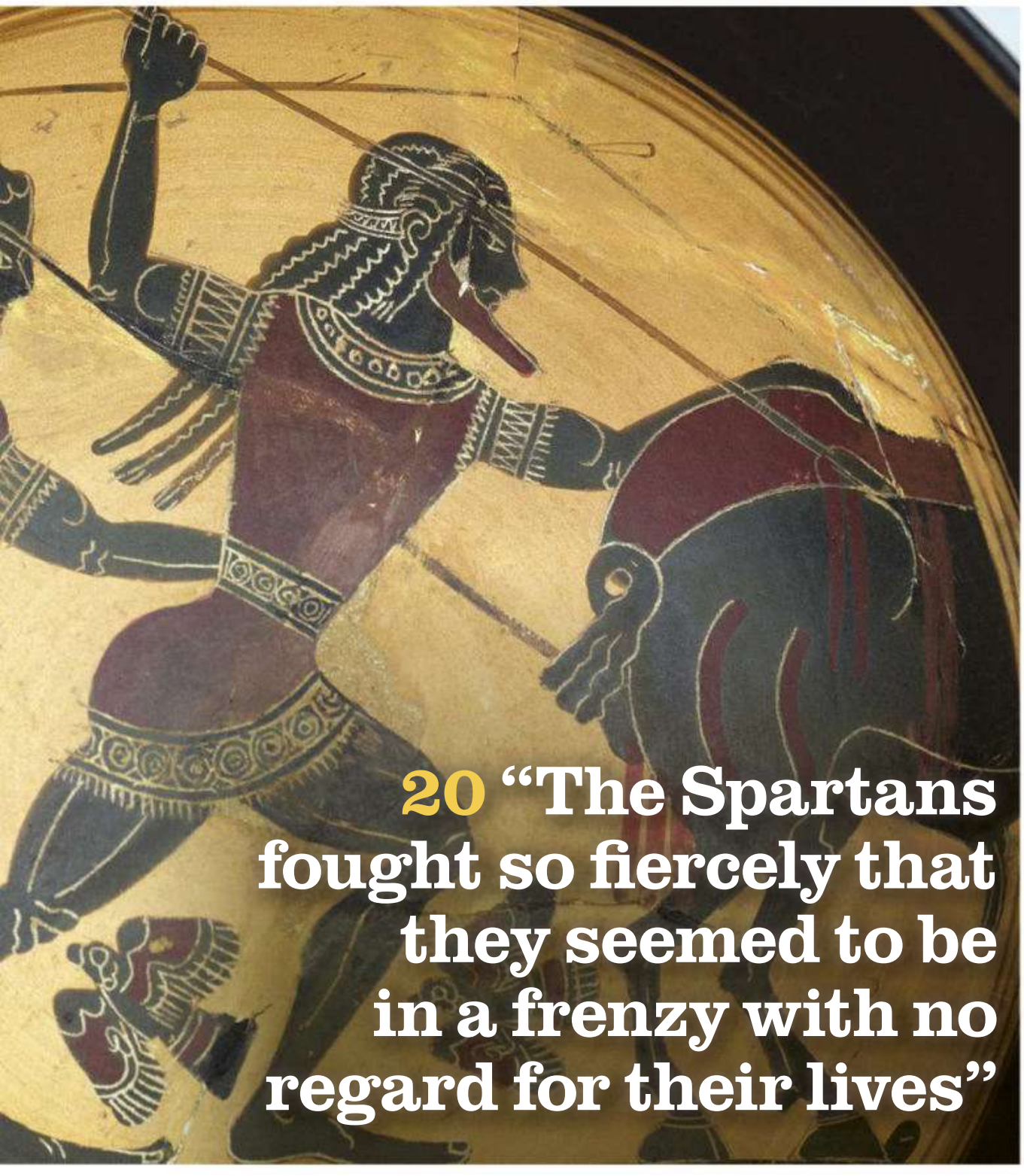
66 Life stories of seven pioneering **black Britons**

DREAMSTIME/GETTY IMAGES/MIRRORPIX–JOHN GALLAGHER/BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY

35 Why we disparage the genius of **medieval science at our peril**



50 How the Franco-Prussian War had dire consequences for 20th-century Europe



20 **“The Spartans fought so fiercely that they seemed to be in a frenzy with no regard for their lives”**

EVERY MONTH

This month in history

7 **History news**
11 **Michael Wood** on the Greeks’ first glimpse of Britain
12 **Anniversaries**
16 **David Olusoga’s Hidden Histories**
18 **Letters**

48 **Q&A** Your history questions answered

Books

74 **Interview:** Neil Oliver talks about his new book, which explores how the lives of our ancient ancestors can help cure our modern malaise
78 New history **books reviewed**

Encounters

86 **Diary:** What to see and do this month, including TV & radio, food and exhibitions
92 **Explore:** Rye, East Sussex

96 **Prize crossword**

98 **My history hero**
Susie Dent chooses Francis Grose

40 Subscribe

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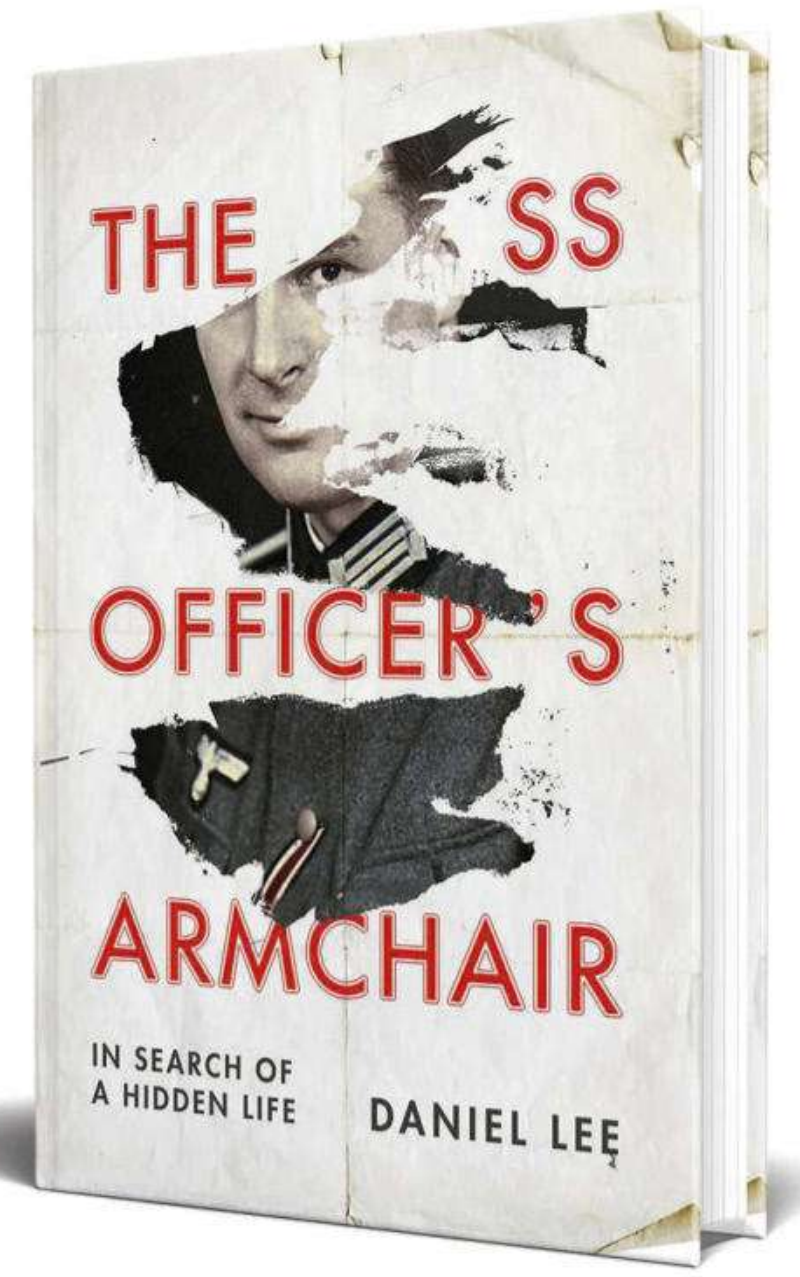

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VALERIE HARDY

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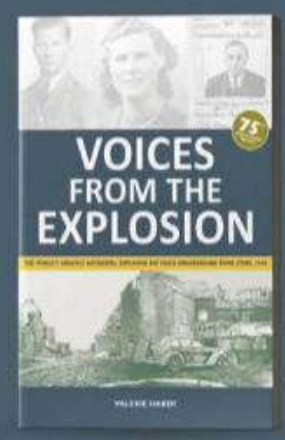

INCLUDES: Scenes from the crater site and an interview with author Valerie Hardy, who lived through the experience and who, in bringing together for the first time eyewitness accounts and personal testimonies, crafts a compelling read and an extraordinary insight into this largely unknown wartime tragedy.

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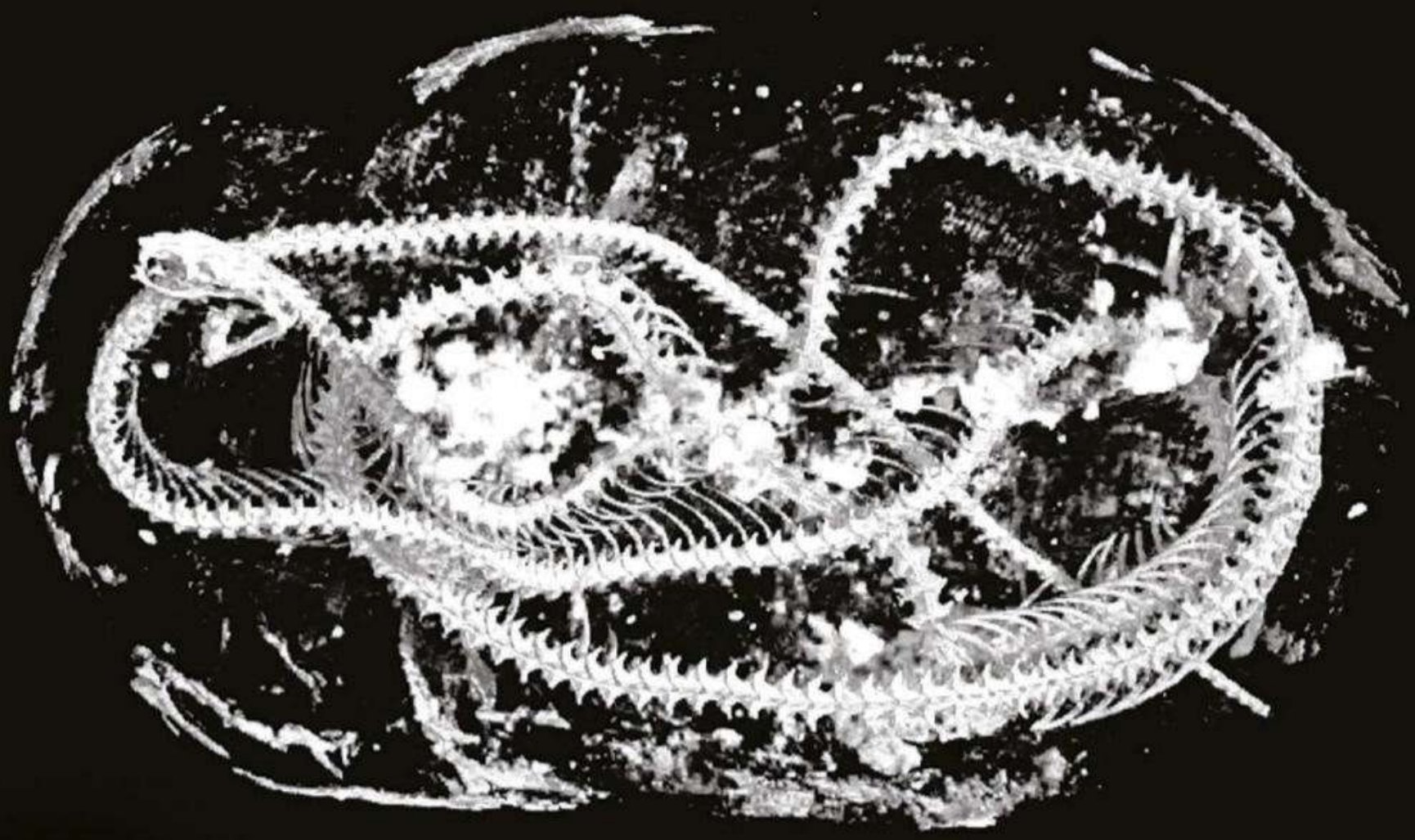


EGYPT CENTRE/SWANSEA UNIVERSITY

EYE-OPENER

Grim revelations

The mummified remains of three animals sacrificed as offerings to the souls of the dead in ancient Egypt have been unwrapped and dissected – without physically removing their bandages.

The snake, cat and bird, all of which are at least 2,000 years old, were examined using specialist scanners by a team from Swansea University and Leicester University. The resulting 3D images (one of which is shown above) have 100 times the resolution of a medical scan, and reveal new details of the animals' deaths. The cat – or, more accurately, kitten – appears to have been strangled, while the snake also met a brutal end: its kidneys had hardened before death, suggesting dehydration, and bone fractures indicate it was killed with a whipping action. Both cases suggest the animals were deliberately killed to produce votive offerings.

Have a story? Please email Matt Elton at matt.elton@immediate.co.uk

TALKING POINTS
Musical statues

The British Museum's repositioning of a statue of its founder, Hans Sloane, due to his involvement in the slave trade sparked much debate online. **ANNA WHITELOCK** watched it unfold

The reverberations of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement continue and, as the British Museum reopened its doors in August, it revealed that it had done a bit of rearranging. A statue of its founder, Hans Sloane, had been moved – or, as some sections of the press put it, "removed".

John Wilson (@JohnWilson14) was one of many to clarify this point. As he put it: "It's been taken off [its] pedestal and put into a cabinet surrounded by artefacts that explore his wealth and collecting in context of the human exploitation which enabled it. Modern enlightenment at the British Museum."

Save Our Statues (@_SaveOurStatues) did not accept the distinction nor support the action taken: "British Museum removes bust of its founder from its pedestal and labels him a slave owner. Such disrespect and ingratitude to a man whose generosity has helped preserve so much world history for millions to enjoy." **Emma Webb** (@Emma_A_Webb), meanwhile, looked to defend Sloane's reputation. "Sloane was a physician who carried out surgery for free, donated his salary to the hospital where he worked, and founded the first hospital to care for abandoned children," she wrote. "The museum should be proud of their founder and honour him!"

Alan Sked (@profsked) asked: "When are we just going to accept that the past is a foreign country with standards of its own? And that, up to the late 18th century, the whole world viewed slavery as normal?" Meanwhile, **Dan Hicks** (@profdanhicks) suggested the museum had acted unnecessarily. "There were no public calls for Hans Sloane's bust to be moved from one part of the British Museum to another," he wrote. "Instead the #BLM calls are for the permanent return of stolen African objects, and for the British Museum to diversify its curatorial team – ie, [they're] about the present, not just the past." **Chris Garrard** (@TheGarrard) thought similarly: "Moving Sloane statue is gesture politics, not genuine engagement with decolonisation, which would involve initiatives on inclusion/representation, rebalancing governance, engaging with restitution claims, developing antiracist policies...".

Join the debate at **twitter.com/historyextra**

For some, it was an issue of consistency. As **Javier Pes** (@JavierPes1) put it: "Sloane might be named as a slaver but Joseph Banks, arch-imperialist and supporter of slavery, remains on his pedestals in the 'enlightenment' gallery. For balance?" Others, including **Fabian Halliburton** (@fab1official), did support the BM's move. "These kinds of progressive steps are definitely what's needed. Although adults are more difficult to educate than children, these steps ensure future generations are aware." The debate looks set to continue. In the words of **Malcolm Quinn** (@MalcolmQuinn9), "So the British Museum became the Sloane Rearranger. Let's see what happens next." Indeed.

A bust of British Museum founder Hans Sloane, which has been relocated to a cabinet – prompting a mixed response

"When will we accept that the past is a foreign country with its own standards?"

Covid-19 measures, such as at this National Trust house in Sussex, pose financial challenges for heritage bodies

HERITAGE

Coronavirus impact hits history sector

The economic effects of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic continue to be felt around the UK, with several major historical and heritage organisations reporting changes in the way they carry out their day-to-day operations.

One of the most significant shifts is being considered by the National Trust, which expects to suffer a loss of up to £200m as a result of the outbreak. As well as redundancy measures affecting about 10 per cent of its staff, proposals listed on a leaked briefing document include holding fewer exhibitions and decreasing its focus on historic homes. In response to criticism from some in the heritage sector, the Trust's director general, Hilary McGrady, argued that she was "in charge of making sure the organisation survives".

Another institution facing an uncertain future is Bletchley Park, the Buckinghamshire estate used as a code-breaking centre during the Second World War. Again citing the economic impact caused by closure and reduced visitor numbers, Bletchley Park Trust chief executive, Iain Standen, suggested the museum looked set to lose £2m in 2020. Up to a third of its workforce are due to lose their jobs, and cuts have been made to the money spent on new exhibitions and a range of other costs.

Despite praising the role of staff in Bletchley Park's success, Standen was downbeat. "The economic impact of the current crisis is having a profound effect on the trust's ability to survive," he said. "We have exhausted all other avenues, and we need to act now to ensure that the trust survives."

GETTY IMAGES/STEFAN ROUSSEAU-PA IMAGES

HISTORY IN THE NEWS

A selection of the stories hitting the **history headlines**

The skeleton of a monk found at Westminster Abbey – one of hundreds, or possibly thousands, at the site

Westminster Abbey project uncovers 'monk burial ground'

Researchers have located the remains of a demolished section of London's Westminster Abbey – as well as what appears to be a burial ground for hundreds, or even thousands, of monks.

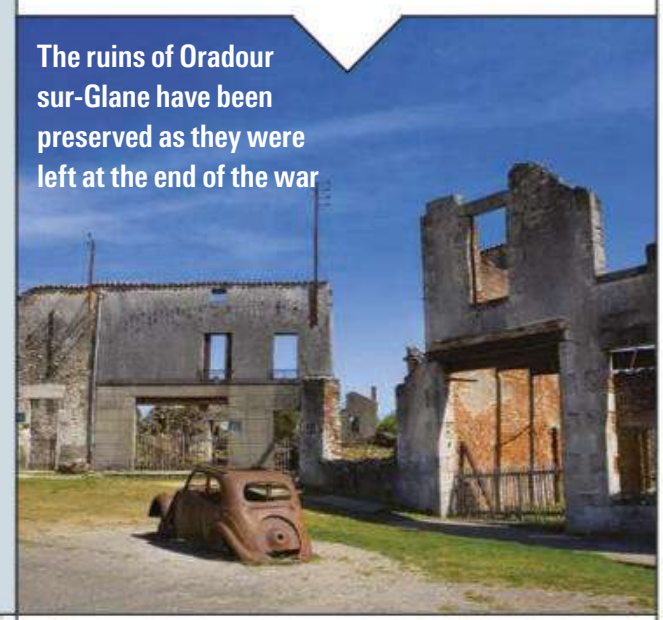
The project is focusing on a stretch of land earmarked for use as a new visitor centre, and aims to provide a better understanding of the abbey's medieval footprint before work on the centre begins.

The demolished building was a sacristy – in which monks kept their robes, chalices and sacred items – commissioned by Henry III in the 1250s, and pulled down in the 1740s as it was structurally unsound.

It's thought that the monastic cemetery is even older, as the site was used by religious communities as far back as the eighth century. This means that, while the remains are remarkably well preserved, the sheer number of buried bodies isn't such a surprise. "This will be the case right the way across the abbey site," said archaeologist Chris Mayo. "Ultimately, its grounds once went much further still. This whole area was awash with burials."

Vandalism of Nazi massacre memorial sparks anger

The defacing of a memorial to Nazi crimes committed in France during the Second World War has been widely condemned by politicians. An inscription at the ruined village of Oradour-sur-Glane, hundreds of whose inhabitants were brutally murdered by SS troops in 1944, has been changed from "martyr village" to read "liar village". French president Emmanuel Macron described the damage as "unspeakable", and vowed to trace those responsible.



The ruins of Oradour sur-Glane have been preserved as they were left at the end of the war

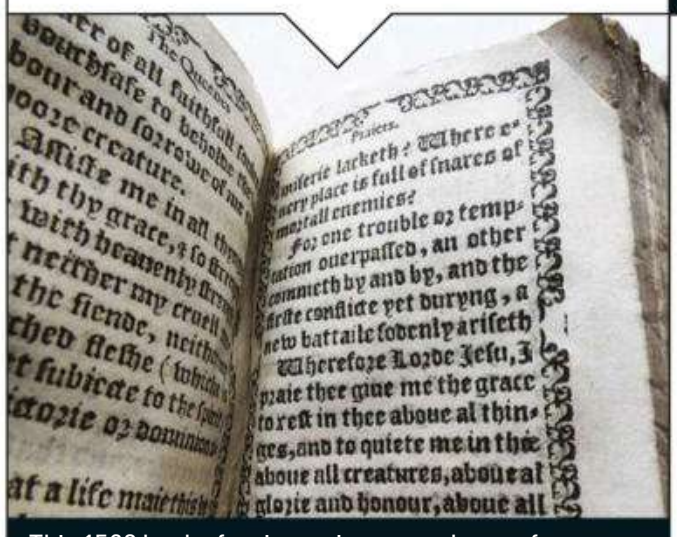
House yields 16th-century haul

Restoration work on a Norfolk country house has revealed a wealth of Tudor artefacts, including a lushly illuminated manuscript and a collection of textiles. The artefacts were discovered at the National Trust-owned Oxburgh Hall, hidden beneath the floorboards of the house's attic. Experts think that the devoutly Catholic Bedingfield family, who owned the house, may have deliberately concealed the manuscript and other objects due to the persecution they experienced in the period.

The arboreal location of a recently unearthed Iron Age hillfort, precise details of which are being kept secret

Volunteers find Iron Age hillfort

A team of 'citizen scientists' in the Chiltern Hills has discovered the remains of an Iron Age site thought to date from between 800 and 500 BC. Members of the Chilterns Conservation Board's Beacons of the Past project examined laser scans of the area to help identify possible archaeological finds – including this defended settlement or camp, which was hidden beneath trees. Work will now begin to preserve the site, the precise location of which is being kept secret to help protect its remains.



This 1568 book of scripture is among the artefacts found hidden under the attic of Oxburgh Hall in Norfolk

Coogan reveals Richard III film

A movie exploring the 2012 discovery of Richard III's remains beneath a Leicester car park will start filming next year, it's been confirmed. The big-screen drama is set to star actor and comedian Steve Coogan as the husband of Philippa Langley, the Richard III Society member whose devotion to the project was pivotal in locating the Plantagenet king's skeleton. The film will be written by Coogan and Jeff Pope, who were Oscar-nominated for their 2013 drama *Philomena*.

Philippa Langley with a model of Richard III's head. A new film will explore her role in finding his remains

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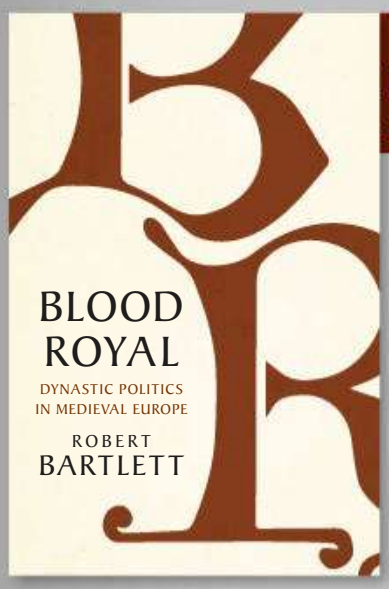

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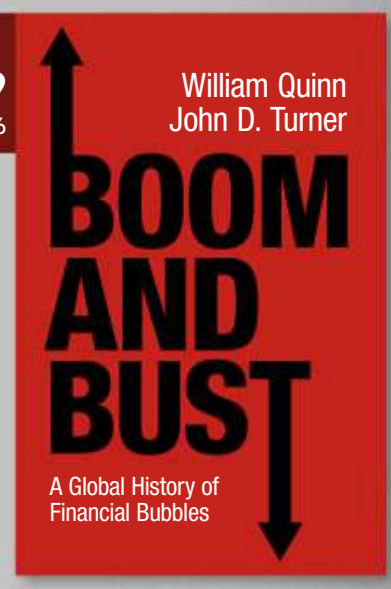

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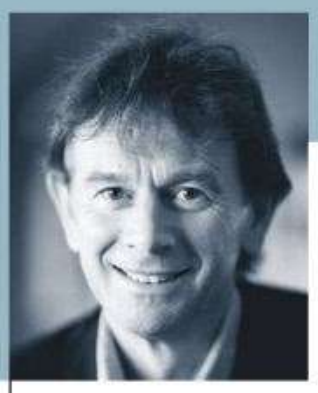


MICHAEL WOOD ON...
THE GREEKS' FIRST GLIMPSE OF BRITAIN

"Pytheas's narrative is one of the famous lost books of history"

Here's a summer tale for an autumn day – a sailor's yarn. I'm writing this in an old shipping office in Amorgos in the Cyclades; along the quay a few yachts with rattling halyards, a fisherman cleaning his nets and washing the deck of his caique. On the wall, faded posters advertise tickets to Rhodes, Haifa and Alexandria, Bari, Venice and Trieste. Old connections deep in history. Shades of Cavafy's magical journey in Ithaca: the joy as "you enter harbours you're seeing for the first time".

Until the Second World War, caiques from Amorgos went to the south of France every summer with wine, olive oil and cloth – as no doubt they did in ancient times, coasting by what the old salts still call the 'ancient stopping places', used since the Bronze Age. That was what it was like to live, as Plato said, "like frogs around a pond".

Going outside the Mediterranean was a different matter. Around 500 BC, Scylax, a Greek captain working for the Persians, made a two-year voyage down the Indus river and round the Gulf to the Red Sea. But exploration westwards came later. It was in around 325 BC that a Greek navigator first explored the Atlantic shores of northern Europe. Pytheas, a native of the Greek colony at Marseilles, managed to circumnavigate Britain, enter the Baltic and reach the edge of the pack ice in the gloomy wastes beyond Iceland – an incredible feat.

But in the Roman world Pytheas was branded a liar, just as Marco Polo would be. To a Mediterranean audience, tides 30 feet high off the coast of Brittany were unbelievable. Especially mind-boggling was Pytheas's description of what awaited beyond the last land, 'Ultima Thule'. It was there that Pytheas recounted seeing the *pleumōn* (literally the 'lung' of the sea), an eerie world in which the water congealed in an icy fog and transmogrified into heaving pack ice.

Sadly, Pytheas's narrative is among history's most famous lost books, now known merely from quotes by later geographers. Only in modern times has his work been considered anew, and his trip reinstated as one of the great voyages of discovery. A key factor in this reinterpretation is Pytheas's measurements of latitude, three of which, it turns out, were taken in Cornwall, on the Isle of Man and near Stornoway.

It's unfortunate that we don't know more about Pytheas himself. From what we can tell, he seems curious, resourceful and open-minded – one of the most attractive characteristics of Greeks of that age. We also lack detail of his journeys inland, where he claims he spent time among the indigenous Britons: the Pretani, or 'painted people'.

So how was Pytheas able to make this voyage? Some think he travelled with sailors on local boats, passed from one community to another, on the ocean-going vessels that worked the Atlantic seaboard in the Iron Age. But I wonder if it is not more likely that Pytheas sailed in a Greek merchantman – the kind of boat that left the mysterious 'Macedonian' anchor stock raised in 1974 off the Llŷn Peninsula, north Wales, and now in the National Museum in Cardiff.

But why did Pytheas so boldly go where no man had been before? Was curiosity his only motivation? Was he operating as a lone merchant venturer? Or was he acting on a commission? Let's explore that idea a moment.

In 325 BC, Alexander the Great arrived back in Iran having touched the northern and eastern edges of the known world in the Pamirs and the Himalayan foothills. But in June 323 BC, his iron constitution undermined by drink, wounds and malaria, Alexander lay on his deathbed in Babylon. There were grand final plans, we are told: an enormous new fleet, a superhighway through north Africa to Gibraltar – and the conquest of Europe. "Had he lived," says the historian Arrian, "he would not have stopped until he had subdued even the Britannic islands to his rule." So had Alexander already received Pytheas's report, titled 'On the Ocean', before his final illness? Had he even commissioned the journey? And how intriguing to speculate what might have happened had Alexander recovered by the banks of the Euphrates and set off towards the land of the 'Painted People'? The 'what ifs' of history are always so enticing – but what wouldn't we give for Pytheas's book on his adventures to be rediscovered!

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series and his latest book is *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster, 2020)

BBC

ILLUSTRATION BY **FEMKE DE JONG**

ANNIVERSARIES

DOMINIC SANDBROOK highlights events that took place in November in history

23 NOVEMBER 1644

Milton fights for free speech

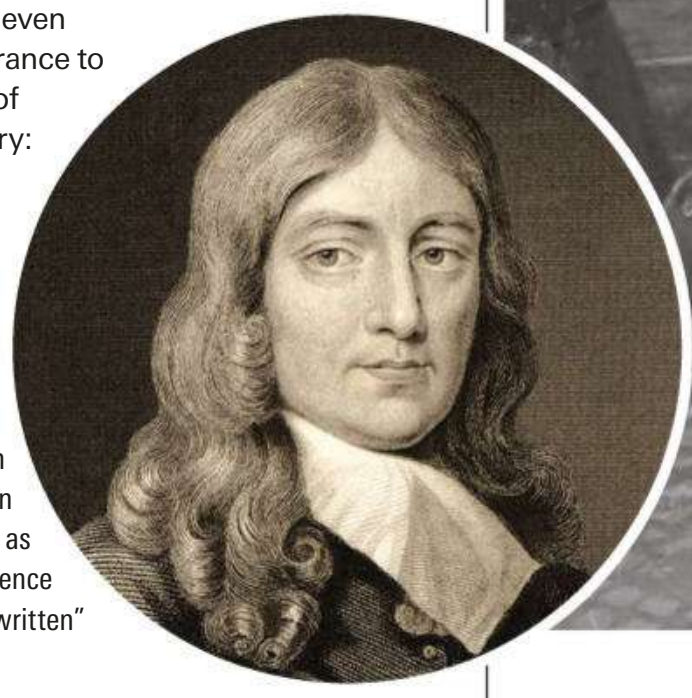
The writer publishes Areopagitica – a blistering attack on government censorship

In the autumn of 1644, civil war was raging in England. More than a year earlier, parliament had passed a Licensing Order insisting that all publications must be registered with the government, and giving itself the power to destroy offensive books and imprison their authors.

But on 23 November, one of parliament's greatest champions published a blistering attack on the principle of censorship. Not yet the author of *Paradise Lost*, John Milton was a half-blind private schoolmaster. But the idea of licensing books, he wrote, was "a dishonour and derogation to the author, to the book, to the privilege and dignity of learning". For "if we think to regulate printing, thereby to rectifie manners", he wrote sternly, "we must regulate all recreations and pastimes, all that is delightful to man".

Milton's motives were both personal and political. After his teenage wife had deserted him, he had written several tracts arguing for the legalisation of divorce, and he was alarmed that such works would be banned under the new regime. But he was also writing from genuine intellectual conviction. He truly believed in the principle of free speech, and entitled his broadside *Areopagitica* after a speech by the Greek rhetorician Isocrates.

Areopagitica has gone down in history as perhaps the greatest defence of free speech ever written. One line is even engraved above the entrance to the main reading room of New York's Public Library: "A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, imbalm'd and treasur'd up on purpose to a life beyond life."



Areopagitica by John Milton (seen here in an engraving) is remembered as "perhaps the greatest defence of free speech ever written"

The bodies of suspected British agents shot by the IRA on 21 November 1920 are returned to England. Their deaths were shortly followed by the Bloody Sunday shootings at Croke Park Gaelic football ground, in which 14 civilians died

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

28 NOVEMBER 1443

After years serving in the Ottoman army, the **Albanian commander Skanderbeg rebels**, captures the city of Krujë and, for the first time, raises a red flag with a black double-headed eagle – the national flag of Albania today.

21 NOVEMBER 1920

Carnage unfolds on Bloody Sunday

Tensions in Dublin spill over into violent mayhem

For the people of Dublin, Sunday 21 November 1920 began in blood and got worse. For almost two years, Ireland had been ripped apart by violence between pro-independence republicans and the British authorities. By November, some 300 people had already been killed. But both sides had gone too far to turn back now.

Early on Sunday morning, Irish Republican Army assassination squads fanned out across the capital. On the orders of their intelligence chief, Michael Collins, they had identified 20 suspected British agents and informers. Within hours, 14 of them were dead, shot in cold blood. Later, Collins said he had no more pity for them than he would for a "dangerous reptile. By their destruction the very air is made sweeter."

As the news spread across Dublin, the tension rose. That afternoon, despite the increasingly anxious atmosphere, thousands of spectators poured into Croke Park for the Gaelic football match between Dublin and Tipperary. Unfortunately, the British had identified the match as a potential flashpoint, and as the clock ticked towards half past three, the stadium was surrounded by policemen, auxiliaries and 'Black and Tans' – British recruits drafted into the local police force, most of whom were unemployed war veterans.

What followed was carnage. Almost as soon as the first Black and Tans reached the stadium, they began shooting. According to one republican paper, "the spectators were startled by a volley of shots fired from inside the turnstile entrances. Armed and uniformed men were seen entering the field, and immediately after the firing broke out, scenes of the wildest confusion took place. The spectators made a rush for the far side of Croke Park and shots were fired over their heads and into the crowd."

The gunfire lasted for just two minutes; but that was all it took. Fourteen civilians were killed or mortally wounded, including a young woman about to get married and two boys, aged 10 and 11. Ever since, Bloody Sunday has been a near-sacred day in Irish history.

29 NOVEMBER 1830

In Warsaw, a group of young officers launch an armed **uprising against Russian imperial rule**. But after almost a year's fighting, the patriotic rebellion is crushed, and Polish independence has to wait for almost another century.

20 NOVEMBER 1947

With Britain in the grip of postwar austerity, **Princess Elizabeth marries Philip Mountbatten** in a relatively low-key ceremony – although they do have a 9ft, four-tiered fruit cake, made from 80 oranges, almost 700 eggs and three gallons of rum.

The c1890 artwork for a board game inspired by the globe-trotting adventures of journalist Nellie Bly, who aimed to make it around the world in fewer than 80 days

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

14 NOVEMBER 1889

Nellie Bly races around the world

The journalist aims to beat the fictional 80-day record set by Phileas Fogg

At the age of 24, Nellie Bly was one of the best-known journalists in the United States. Her exposé of conditions inside a New York asylum, *Ten Days in a Mad-House*, had made her a celebrity, and she needed a good follow-up. In the summer of 1888, she picked up Jules Verne's book *Around the World in Eighty Days*. By the time she had finished it, she knew what she was going to do.

At first, people scoffed at her claim that she could beat Phileas Fogg's fictional 80-day record. "In the first place you are a woman and would need a protector," she was told, "and even if it were possible for you to travel alone, you would need to carry so much baggage that it would detain you in making rapid changes." But Bly stuck to her guns, and *The New York World* eventually agreed to sponsor her.

A year later, at 9.40am on the morning of 14 November 1889, Nellie stepped onto the *Augusta Victoria*, a steamer belonging to the Hamburg America Line, for the ocean crossing to Southampton. She brought only the clothes she was wearing – a sensible dress and thick overcoat – as well as a small bag. But she carried most of her money around her neck, the newspaper having issued her with £200 in English pounds, the equivalent of at least £100,000 today.

As Bly travelled east, the newspaper breathlessly reported her progress. Across the Atlantic, then across the Channel; down through France, where she met Jules Verne; through Italy, across the Mediterranean and through the Suez Canal. Readers were invited to guess the exact time she would return; hundreds of thousands of entries poured in. She visited a leper colony in China and bought a monkey in Singapore. And at 3.51 on the afternoon of 25 January 1890, her train pulled into Jersey City. Nellie had done it – and it had taken her just 72 days.

Aided by his guide, Woldo, Scottish explorer James Bruce reached the origin of the Blue Nile in 1770

14 NOVEMBER 1770

James Bruce reaches the Blue Nile's source

The Scottish explorer fulfils his mission to find the river's origin

For the Scottish explorer James Bruce, it was a moment of exquisite vindication. After years of dreaming and weeks of trudging, he was a few hundred yards from his goal, the source of the Blue Nile in the mountains of Ethiopia – then believed to be the Nile's main point of origin.

Yet now, when the prize was almost in sight, Bruce's guide, Woldo, decided to cut up rough. He was feeling ill, he said, and could not go on. Bruce knew what Woldo really wanted. He untied his fine silk sash and handed it to the guide. "Come, come," Bruce said, "we understand each other; no more words; lose no more time, but carry me to Geesh and the head of the Nile, directly."

Gratefully clutching the sash, Woldo pointed to the spot, a hillock in the midst of a watery marsh. Bruce kicked off his shoes and began running, and eventually he came to an "island of green turf, which was in the form of an altar". It was 14 November 1770, and he had found it.

Emotion overcame him. "Though a mere private Briton," Bruce later wrote,"I triumphed here, in my own mind, over kings and their armies." He took out a cup made from a coconut shell, which he had bought in Arabia, and filled it with water from the spring. Then, at last, he drank a toast "to His Majesty King George III, and a long line of princes". H

Dominic Sandbrook's latest book is *Who Dares Wins: Britain, 1979–1982* (Allen Lane, 2019)

GETTY IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK

WHY WE SHOULD REMEMBER...

When Britain's gender politics were laid bare **by Page 3 nudity**

BY **MAGGIE ANDREWS**

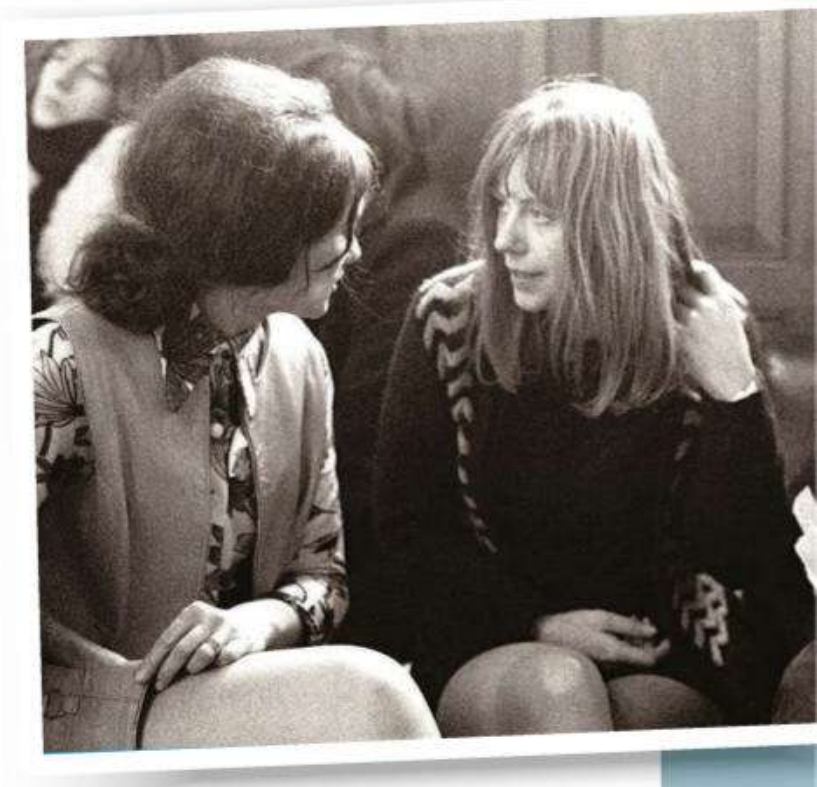
Fifty years ago, on 17 November 1970, Britain published its first topless Page 3 spread. This was the consequence of a heady mix of a competitive newspaper industry and an increasingly sexually permissive society. *The Sun's* pictures of semi-naked young women were part of a successful strategy to dominate the tabloid market by positioning the paper as modern, cheeky, irreverent and fun-loving. They followed a decade which had seen the Profumo affair, the introduction of the contraceptive pill, homosexuality decriminalised, abortions legalised and divorce made easier. Deference to middle-class prudery had been abandoned amid an explosion of media portrayals of sex as fun, in the saucy, camp *Carry On* films.

Although Page 3 appeared only a few months after the first National Women's Liberation conference, it initially received little attention from feminists. Pin-ups were not new – images of scantily clad women were ubiquitous in, for example, Bond movies and car adverts – and by the end of the 1970s, Page 3 girls were a regular feature of *The Sun,* the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Star.* Sexualised images of semi-naked women were no longer considered smutty – to be kept under the bed or inside a locker – but mundane, part of everyday life, on view at the breakfast table, wrapped around fish and chips, protecting tables in primary schools when children had painting lessons.

"Images of semi-naked women were considered mundane, to be wrapped around fish and chips"

In 1986, MP Clare Short introduced a Private Members' Bill to ban Page 3. Her unsuccessful campaign ignited wider debate around the media's sexualisation of women. To some, Page 3 and other media portrayals of women as sex objects were lighthearted, harmless fun, the models liberated, confident women who were in control of their own sexuality. To others, these images objectified and degraded women. The *Mirror* withdrew Page 3, but *The Sun* revelled in the controversy, calling Short a "killjoy… fat and jealous".

Attacks on those questioning Page 3 were personal but also very political, part of the populist and nationalistic discourse that gained traction in the new millennium. Opponents were characterised as the 'loony left', while in 2012 the editor of *The Sun* defended Page 3 as an "innocuous British institution… part of British society". Nevertheless, *The Sun* finally abandoned Page 3 in 2015. The *Daily Star* followed suit in 2019, two years after the #MeToo movement served as a reminder that what some consider lighthearted fun, others see as an exploitative abuse of power. H



Although the first Page 3 appeared just months after the first National Women's Liberation conference in 1970 (pictured), it initially attracted little attention from feminists

Maggie Andrews is emeritus professor of cultural history at the University of Worcester

HIDDEN HISTORIES

DAVID OLUSOGA explores lesser-known stories from our past

"Half a million cats and dogs were put to death in 1939 – for no good reason"

On the brink of the Second World War, one of the many challenges facing those in government and the civil service tasked with planning for the coming conflict was securing the nation's supplies of food. When war came and the expected aerial bombardment of Britain's cities commenced, could a nation of 47 million people, dependent upon imports, be kept fed?

By the summer of 1939, with war against Germany seemingly inevitable, plans for food rationing were being developed. In August, the government's National Air Raid Precautions Animals Committee issued a pamphlet that was printed in national newspapers and broadcast on the BBC.

Concerned that pet owners would either share their scarce rations with their pets, leaving themselves under-fed, or abandon their animals to starve, the committee offered official *Advice to Animal Owners*. That advice was that, where possible, pets be sent from the cities to the countryside. But, in what appeared almost a throwaway comment, it concluded that where this was not possible, "it really is kindest to have them destroyed".

The pamphlet even carried an illustrated advertisement for a captive bolt pistol. The pistol, the ad stated, "provides the speediest, most efficient and reliable means of destroying any animal, including horses, cats, and all sizes of dogs".

When war came in September, thousands of pet owners dutifully flocked to animal shelters to have their beloved pets euthanised. There were queues half a mile long; supplies of chloroform ran out. During the first days of the war, an estimated 400,000 to 750,000 dogs and cats were slaughtered in what the National Canine Defence League called, at the time, the "September Holocaust".

In Memoriam notices appeared in the press. "Happy memories of Iola, sweet faithful friend, given sleep September 4th 1939, to be saved suffering during the war. A short but happy life – 2 years, 12 weeks. Forgive us little pal," said one in *Tail-Wagger* magazine.

Why were pet owners so compliant? Some clearly feared food supplies would run out, while others felt the 'luxury' of owning a pet in wartime could not be justified and was therefore 'unpatriotic' – both sentiments that were reinforced by government propaganda. Others simply panicked.

Yet the tragic truth is that the pet massacre was unnecessary. At the time the government advised it, food was not yet scarce (rationing would not be introduced until January 1940) and the full force of the Blitz had yet to be felt.

Some pet owners later said they regretted their actions, partly because pets provided valuable companionship and, in the case of cats, vermin control. Criticism soon started to appear in the press. By November 1939, *The Times* was lamenting that "There is daily evidence that large numbers of pet dogs are still being destroyed for no better reason than that it is inconvenient to keep them alive – which, of course, is no reason at all, but merely shows an owner's inability to appreciate his obligations towards his animal."

Unsurprisingly, there were protests from animal welfare groups including the PDSA (People's Dispensary for Sick Animals), the RSPCA, and animal-lovers such as Nina Douglas-Hamilton, co-founder of the Animal Defence and Anti-Vivisection Society, who created a pet sanctuary at Ferne House, her Wiltshire country home. Battersea Dogs Home (now called Battersea) also came to the rescue of more than 145,000 dogs.

Today, the Animals in War memorial at London's Hyde Park pays tribute to the animals who served and died alongside British and Allied forces in various conflicts. Sadly there's no memorial – yet – to the strangely forgotten, and shameful, massacre of Britain's pets. H

David Olusoga is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. His series *Britain's Forgotten Slave Owners* is currently available on BBC iPlayer

BBC

Death sentence
A cat in a London pub, 1939. That autumn, queues to have pets euthanised stretched for half a mile, in what would be dubbed the "September Holocaust"

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LETTERS

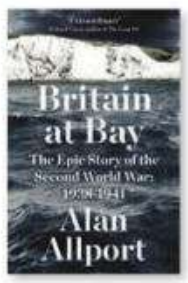
Our feature on the role of the potato in world history was praised by reader Linda Norwood

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Literary escapes

Like many people, I have found much pleasure and escapism in reading during lockdown, so I was delighted to see your list of 36 recommended summer reads in your August issue.

Having just finished Claire Tomalin's brilliant *Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Self*, it seemed fitting that I was drawn to the 17th-century crime fiction novel *An Instance of the Fingerpost* by Iain Pears. This was a completely new genre for me but, as I browsed my local St Helena charity bookshop in Essex, I was delighted to pick it up and proceeded to spend five days totally engrossed in this ingenious and really addictive story. What a great read – thank you to Robyn Young for the tip! Next on the list: *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot. After a couple of chapters, I am already hooked…
Kerry Hackett, Essex



We reward the *Letter of the Month* writer with a copy of a new history book. This issue, that is **Britain at Bay: The Epic Story of the Second World War, 1938–41** by Alan Allport. You can read our review of the book on page 78

Lessons of empire

I followed with interest the *Talking Points* column in your October issue about the legacy of the British empire. As a history teacher, I wanted to defend the profession in regards to Tom Knight's Twitter comments: "Our history lessons teach us that we went out into the world, civilised it, and gave it back with a minimum of fuss when asked politely." This follows a traditional view of history teaching in Britain, but we all know that this was not true. British imperialism was brutal and the native people were treated cruelly and exploited.

Schools have moved away from a traditional political history narrative. Reflection and innovation now dictate that the messes of empire are a central part of discussions in history lessons. We have moved away from 'white man's burden' and have started to discuss the morality of imperial characters such as Winston Churchill, who was bred from a Victorian stock which glamourised empire. We are also debating the morality of statues such as that of Edward Colston.

I think the pace of this change will continue across the next decade, and we will encourage young people to construct a holistic view of the British empire, both positive and negative.
Matt Smith, Kent

An unprecedented president?

I enjoyed reading Mark White's article *A President without Precedent* (September). It was interesting to learn how White sees key aspects of Donald Trump's presidency echoing those of other White House incumbents. Indeed, even on the thorny issue of race relations (on which he argues Trump is without precedent), I suggest that some of his 18th and 19th-century predecessors may well have held comparable views.

The main conclusion I took from the article, however, is that only this current president has acted on such a wide range of controversial topics in such a relatively short period of office!
Paul Banner, Farnborough

Strange currencies

John Wyatt Greenlee's entertaining article describing the trade in eels in the Middle Ages (October) made me reflect on other once-popular forms of currency.

Many have understandably been based on food supplies: the Roman soldier's *salarium* to buy his salt; the cocoa beans valued by the Maya and Aztecs; the bars of tea common throughout Asia; and the dried fish (usually cod) traded in Newfoundland before their first paper money was introduced in 1834. Even today, Italian banks accept wheels of parmesan cheese as collateral for loans; their vaults are estimated to hold the equivalent of $200m in cheese.

Other currencies have been based on everyday tools or clothing, including knives in China in 600 BC, squirrel pelts in Finland and Russia, and the whale teeth that would buy you a bride in the Fiji islands. In Cameroon, potato mashers were considered desirable objects, and in North America wampum beads were traded to Native Americans by European settlers.

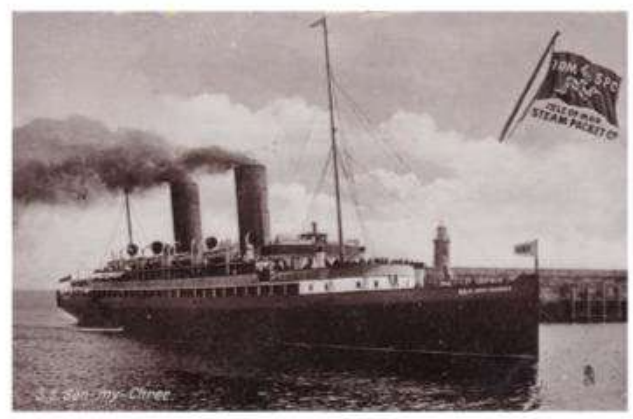
Cowry (sea snail) shells have perhaps been the currency which has lasted longest and been most widespread. They have been exchanged throughout Africa, Asia and Australia and used from the 16th century BC right up to the 1800s in India.

Least practicable of all were probably the doughnut-shaped limestone rocks known as *rai* traded by the Yapese in Micronesia. Weighing several tonnes, they had to be left in situ and a mental note made of any transaction that had been made.
Ian MacDonald, Essex

Islands at war

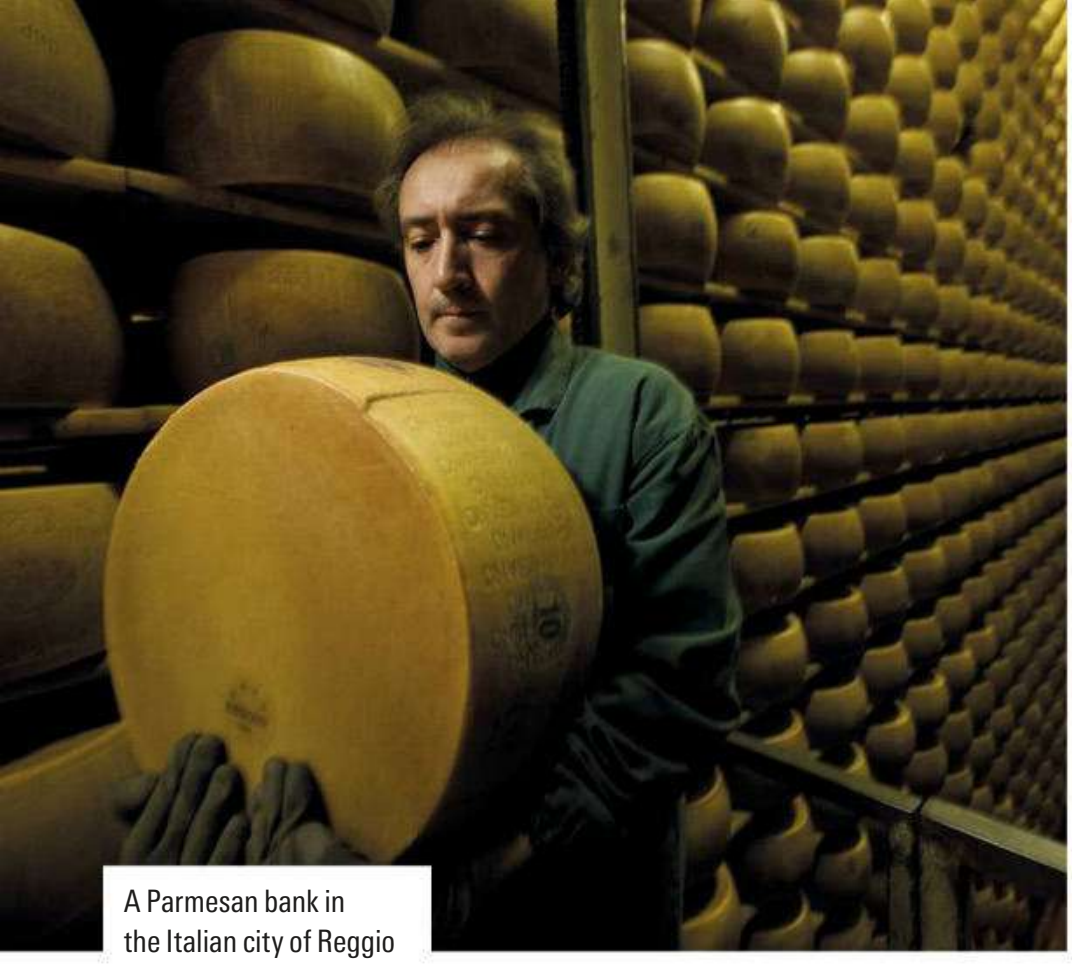
The role of the islands and islanders in the Second World War has not always had the prominence that it deserves, and this was highlighted in recent letters to *BBC History Magazine* (July and September). Another island that played an important part in the conflict and the seafaring aspects of the evacuation of Dunkirk is the Isle of Man.

The Isle of Man has a long and proud tradition of seafaring, and is best known for its famous steam packet boats that have ferried countless eager tourists from the UK to the island for holidays. As one commentator wrote in 1941: "Who could imagine that the Isle of Man packet boats, usually the very expression of holiday happiness, should take



Steam packet boats, as seen on this 1920s postcard, played an important role in the Dunkirk evacuation

DORA KISTELEKI/ALAMY



A Parmesan bank in the Italian city of Reggio Emilia. The cheese is among the currencies whose historical role is highlighted by reader Ian MacDonald

part in naval operations?" But this was indeed what happened.

The bravery of those serving on those fine Manx ships in taking part in one of the most famous naval evacuations in British history – in which they were attacked from the air, sea and the shore – is both commendable and remarkable, since these were tourist ships. Sadly, some of the Manx ships and those serving on them were not to return.

Being Manx-born and a regular reader of *BBC History Magazine*, I hope that historians take a keener interest in the role of all islands during the Second World War.
K Shaw, North Yorkshire

Hot potato

My family laughed when I told them I was reading an article about potatoes. When I began telling them some of the interesting titbits from *How Potatoes Conquered the World* (September), they changed their tune. It was fascinating to learn the history of something we take so much for granted! I'll never eat a chip or jacket potato again without thinking about it.
Linda Norwood, Wordsley

Correction

As reader Lynette Webb points out in response to *Subversive Scribes and Killer Rabbits* (September), 'marginalia' is a plural not a singular noun, as implied by some of our phrasing. Apologies for this error, which was introduced during editing.

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SPARTA'S LAST STAND

Two Spartans brandish spears on this c555 BC Lakonian cup, which is sometimes thought to depict the legendary Calydonian Boar hunt. The Spartans were fierce fighters who valued courage in the face of death – an ideal that the 300 warriors at Thermopylae came to embody

BRIDGEMAN

The 300 Spartans who took on a mighty Persian army at Thermopylae became the stuff of legend. As the 2,500th anniversary of the battle is celebrated this year, **Andrew Bayliss** scours the sources to reveal the truth behind the epic tale

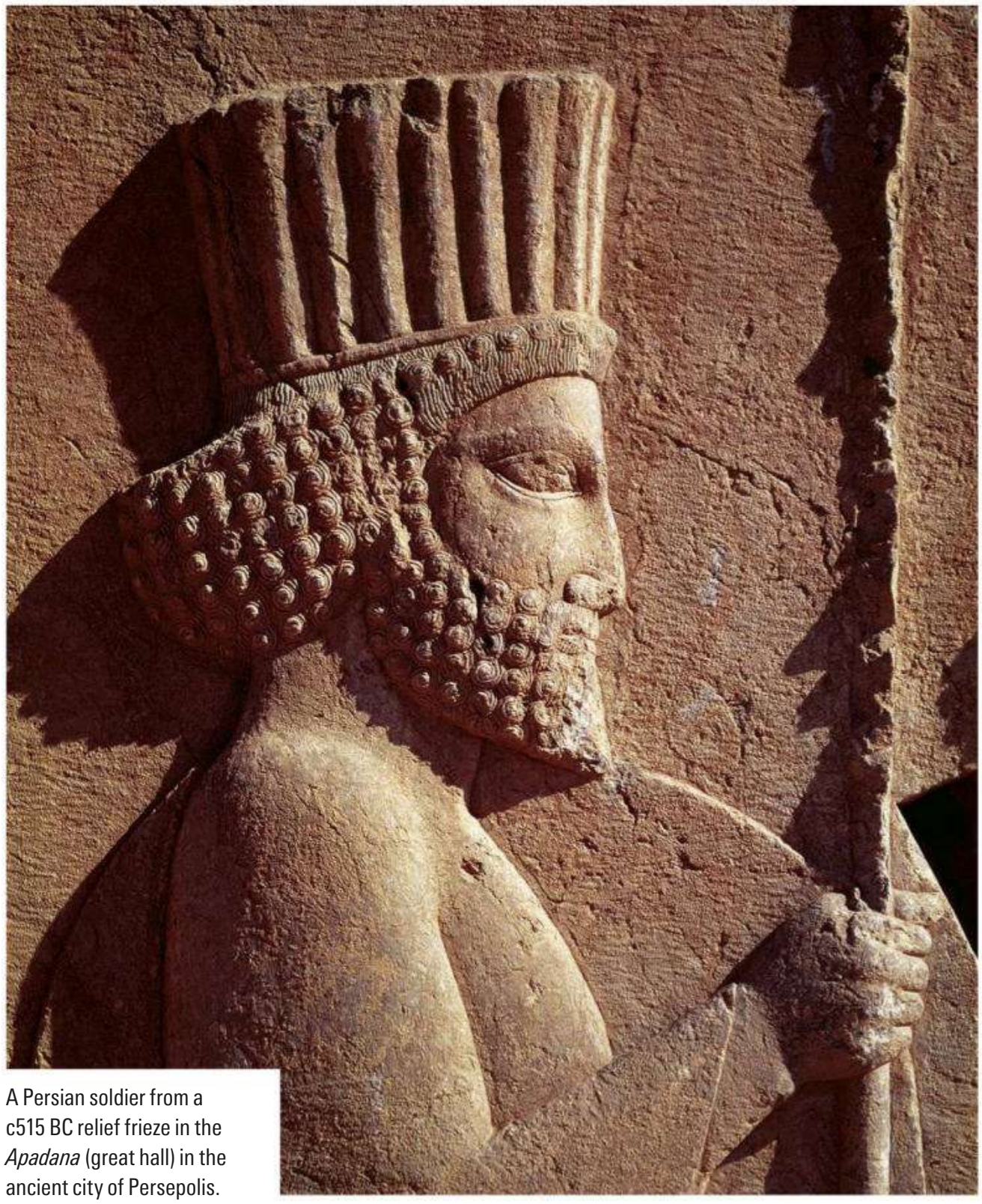
In 480 BC Xerxes, the great king of Persia, headed west into Europe with a massive force – allegedly more than 2 million fighting men and 1,207 warships. He was, by all accounts, a formidable foe. "I am Xerxes, the great king, king of kings, king of countries containing all kinds of men, king in this great earth far and wide," proclaimed the official documents of a monarch whose kingdom stretched from the Balkans to the fringes of the Indian subcontinent. And now, this powerful ruler had come to crush the Greeks, determined to avenge the embarrassing defeat that his father, Darius, had suffered at their hands at the battle of Marathon in 490 BC.

Charged with stopping Xerxes' forces was King Leonidas from the city-state of Sparta, leading 300 Spartan soldiers. Spartan citizens, known as the *homoioi* (equals), were well-versed in the arts of war. They had all been trained in the same brutal, compulsory, state-run education regime, which Plato characterises as "systematic training in the endurance of pain". They kept their hair and beards long and wore uniforms of scarlet cloaks and tunics.

The Spartans joined up with around 6,000 soldiers from southern and central Greece, including 400 men from Thebes (called Thebans) and 700 from Thespiae (known as Thespians). Both city-states were in Boeotia, a region in central Greece. Leonidas set about making his defence of Greece at Thermopylae (the 'Hot Gates'), a narrow pass through the mountains on the main line of communication between northern and central Greece. At its thinnest point, a stretch around 20 metres long, the pass was only 15.5 metres wide, with sheer cliffs on one side and the sea crashing against the rocks on the other. Leonidas hoped to use this natural bottleneck to negate Xerxes' overwhelming numerical superiority.

The odds were so stacked against the Greeks that Xerxes assumed they would flee when they realised the futility of their task. But the Spartans were not daunted. When warned that Xerxes had so many archers that their arrows would darken they sky, the Spartan soldier Dieneces is said to have responded: "We shall fight them in the shade." Later (probably unreliable) tradition had it that when Xerxes lost his temper with the Spartans for daring to face him and demanded they surrender their arms, Leonidas retorted with "*môlon labe*" ("Come and get them").

Despite the overwhelming odds against them, for two whole days Leonidas and his men held off Xerxes' massive force, killing tens of thousands of infantrymen. The Spartans and the other Greeks fought so courageously that, according to Herodotus, they made it clear to everyone, especially Xerxes himself, "that among so many people he [Xerxes] had few *men*" – implying his fighters were not of a similar calibre.



A Persian soldier from a c515 BC relief frieze in the *Apadana* (great hall) in the ancient city of Persepolis. According to Herodotus, the Persian king Xerxes brought more than 2 million troops to Greece

BRIDGEMAN

The odds were so heavily stacked against the Greeks that Xerxes assumed they would flee

The bravest men on Earth

Xerxes should not have been surprised. When his spies reported seeing the Spartans outside their defensive wall (the remains of which can still be seen today), wrestling naked or sitting around combing their hair, Demaratus, an exiled Spartan king in his entourage, explained to Xerxes that they were dressing their hair because they were preparing to die. When Xerxes laughed this off, Demaratus warned him that when fighting together, the Spartans were "the bravest men on Earth" as they feared Spartan law, which demanded that they "not flee from the fight before any multitude of men, but stand firm in their ranks, and either conquer or die". The events at Thermopylae would prove Demaratus correct.

Whereas the Spartans were effectively

A monument to King Leonidas, the leader of the Greek army, in Thermopylae. He led a force of 300 Spartans and around 6,000 men from central and southern Greece

professional soldiers — the Greek historian Xenophon observed that "from the beginning of boyhood they are taught the discipline for land warfare" — the other Greeks at Thermopylae were amateurs: peasants, craftsmen, and landed gentry, all called up to serve only when required.

Although popular accounts tend to overlook them, the Spartans were also accompanied to Thermopylae by perhaps 900 of their helots (slaves), many of whom fought and died alongside their masters.

All the free Greeks with Leonidas fought as 'hoplites'. For protection they wore around 30 kilograms of bronze armour known as *ta hopla* (the arms), from which the term 'hoplite' is derived. This included a helmet, a breastplate, greaves (a type of leg armour), and a large bronze-faced wooden shield, which protected not just the man carrying it on his left arm, but also the right side of his comrade beside him. In terms of weaponry, they carried a wooden spear, a short stabbing sword and a knife.

A fifth-century BC bronze Spartan shield. The Greek soldiers who fought at Thermopylae wore around 30 kilograms of bronze armour

Although Herodotus calculated that there were 2,641,610 fighting men in Xerxes' force, and a later epigram set up after the battle proudly proclaimed, "Here four thousand from the Peloponnese once fought 3 million", modern estimates for Xerxes' army range from 100,000 to 300,000. Herodotus describes the appearance and equipment of contingents from throughout Xerxes' massive polyglot kingdom, including Persians, Medes, Assyrians, Bactrians, Syrians, Arabians, Libyans, Ethiopians, Paphlagonians, Phrygians and Indians, to name but a few. The Persian troops wore loose caps called tiaras on their heads, embroidered sleeved tunics, scaled armour, and baggy trousers – an item of clothing that the tunic-wearing Greeks considered almost an abomination. Their primary weapon was the bow, hence the claim that their arrows would darken the sky. They also carried spears, but we are told by Herodotus that they were shorter than those of their Greek opponents.

A Persian bloodbath

The Spartans and their fellow Greeks repelled wave after wave of Xerxes' men, starting with the Medes and Cissians, and – once Xerxes had grown very impatient – his crack troops, the so-called 'Immortals' (10,000 picked men who were 'immortal' because they were immediately replaced when they fell). The Spartans showed themselves to be skilled fighters on many occasions during the fighting at Thermopylae. Herodotus describes one manoeuvre whereby the Spartans would turn their backs on the Persians, feigning flight, before turning around and cutting the Persians down when they rushed forward in disorderly pursuit. The Greek historian Diodorus claimed "the entire area about the passes was strewn with dead bodies", and Herodotus reports that Xerxes leapt from his throne three times in fear for his army.

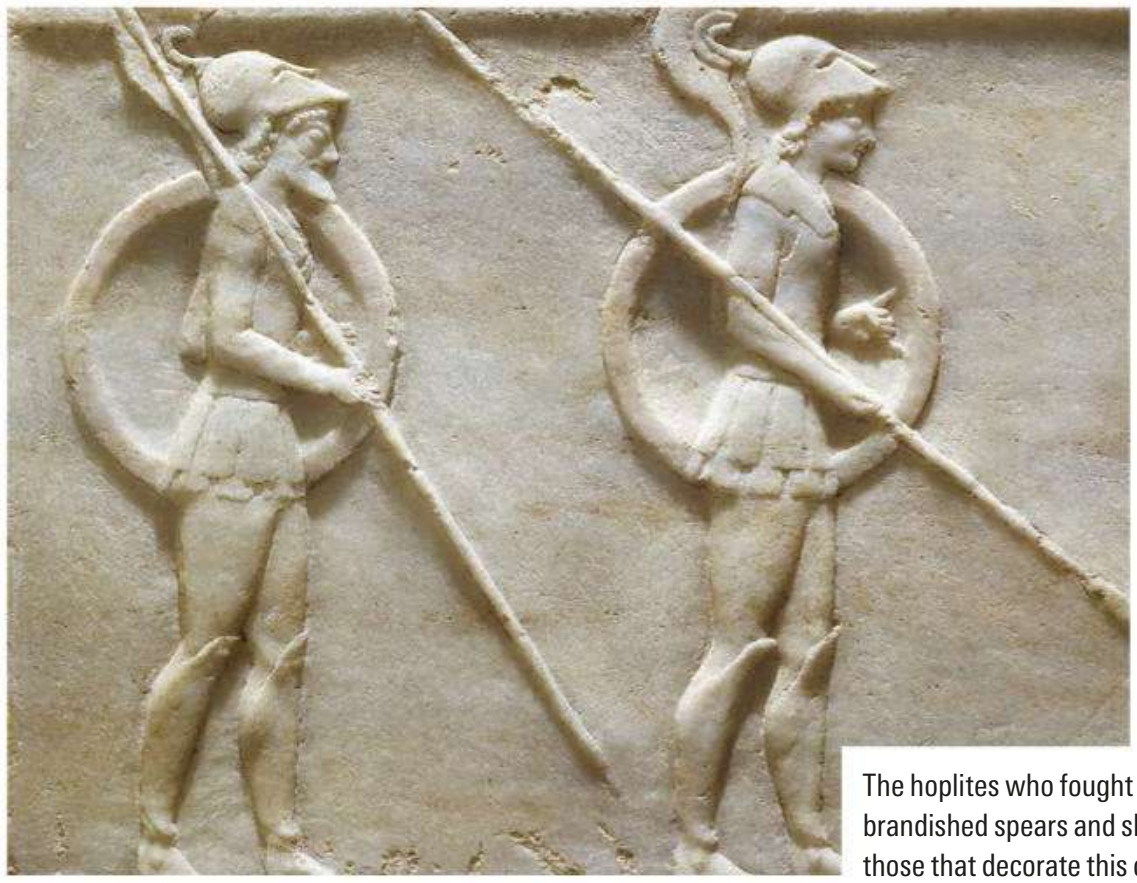
Our sources give an impression of constant and relentless fighting, with the narrowness of the pass enabling the Greeks to eke out their small numbers by fighting in relays. Diodorus even claims that although they normally fought in relays, Leonidas's men refused to rest, with the older and younger soldiers vying to outdo each other in displaying their courage and prowess. Some modern scholars question how realistic this might be, given that modern contact sports, which typically run for 60–90 minutes, leave professional athletes exhausted. But we have to remember that combat and sport are different. The adrenaline rush from fighting for your life means that soldiers in the heat of battle are capable of feats of endurance that modern athletes are not. It is no doubt easier to push through the fog of exhaustion when it is the difference between life and death,

GEORGE PLAKIDES/ALFRED MOLON PHOTO GALLERIES

rather than merely winning or losing.

We will never know how long Leonidas and his men could have continued to hold off Xerxes' forces. For at the close of the second day, when Xerxes was at his wits' end, a local Trachinian Greek named Ephialtes told Xerxes of a path that would let him circumvent the Spartan position. Leonidas had only learned about this easy passage over the spine of the mountain *after* his army had assembled at Thermopylae. He tasked the local Phocian hoplites with guarding this route.

Xerxes sent General Hydarnes and the Immortals with Ephialtes to follow the path that would take them behind the Spartans. Herodotus says they travelled at night, reaching the summit by dawn. Ten thousand men trekking through the mountains in the dark seems rather risky, however, which suggests that Herodotus or his oral sources may have been exaggerating. When the Phocians heard the Persians approaching, they withdrew to higher ground in the mistaken assumption that they were the Persians' main target. Hydarnes and the Persians swept through the open door, leaving the Phocians in their wake. Many modern commentators have criticised Leonidas for not safeguarding this route with Spartan troops, or at least installing a Spartan officer in command of the Phocians.



The hoplites who fought for Leonidas brandished spears and shields, like those that decorate this c490 BC plinth

Leonidas's army fought so fiercely that they seemed to be in a "frenzy" with no regard for their lives

Holding back the hordes

Fortunately, Leonidas was warned that the Greeks would soon be surrounded. Some said he learned from deserters; others that Leonidas's seer foretold it after examining sacrificial victims. Whatever the case, Leonidas made a choice that would echo throughout the ages: he dismissed the other Greeks, but ordered his Spartans to remain and fight, to allow enough time for their allies to withdraw so they could fight another day.

Herodotus says Leonidas's force was so small because it was merely an advance guard tasked with holding Xerxes back until reinforcements could arrive after the Olympic Games and the religious festival of the Carneia, when most of the Peloponnesian Greeks maintained a strict truce. Yet it is possible that this was what Leonidas had intended from the beginning. Herodotus reports that Leonidas's 300 Spartans were deliberately chosen because each had a living son, and one of our later sources, Plutarch, claims that before Leonidas left Sparta, he instructed his wife, Gorgo, to remarry and bear good children. Diodorus states that the Spartan magistrates called *ephors* (overseers) tried to make Leonidas take more men with him to Thermopylae, but he refused, arguing "ostensibly I am leading them to the defence of the passes, but in fact to die for the freedom of all". Herodotus himself believed that

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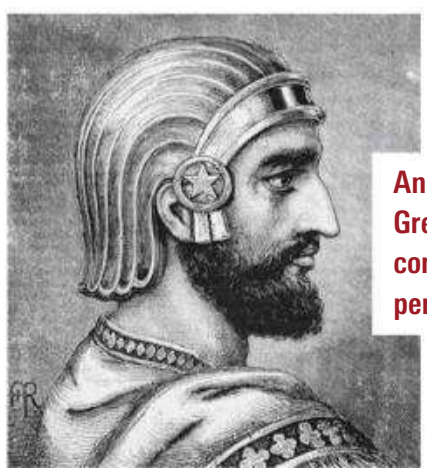
TIMELINE The epic clashes of the Graeco-Persian Wars

c545 BC
Cyrus the Great of Persia annexes the Greek cities of Asia Minor, prompting the Spartans to warn Cyrus not to "injure" any Greek city.

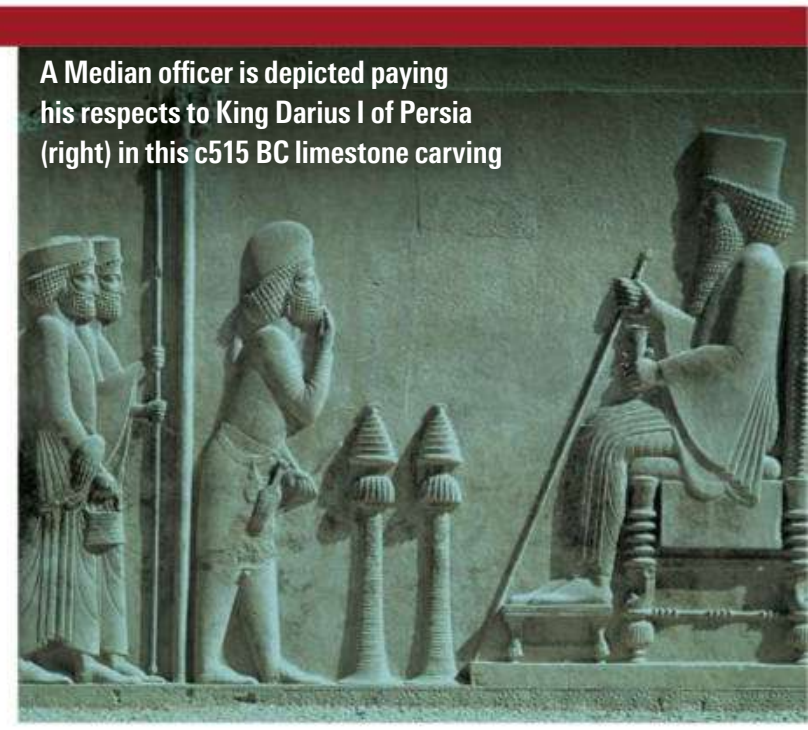
499–493
Greek cities of Asia Minor rebel against King Darius of Persia with support from the European Greek cities of Athens and Eretria.

492
Mardonius (Darius's nephew) leads **a land and sea expedition to Europe that subdues Macedonia**, but this expedition comes to an end when a storm destroys his fleet.

490
Darius sends a smaller amphibious expedition which destroys Eretria, but withdraws after it is **defeated by Athens at the battle of Marathon**.



An engraving of Cyrus the Great. The Persian king's conquests in Asia Minor perturbed Sparta



A Median officer is depicted paying his respects to King Darius I of Persia (right) in this c515 BC limestone carving

The Thermopylae pass as it appears today. Leonidas initially used this natural bottleneck to his advantage, but a secret route over the mountain proved his undoing

Our map shows the location of the vicious battle of Thermopylae, as well as the wider movements of the Persian invading army and navy around the Greek islands (shown in red) and the Greek defenders (shown in blue)

Leonidas chose to remain in order to achieve glory and to fulfil an oracle from Delphi which foretold that Sparta would be destroyed by the Persians unless a king was killed. Some modern scholars think this oracle was a *post eventum* invention, but others believe Leonidas engineered it himself to achieve his glory.

Diodorus says Leonidas's men begged him to lead them against the Persians, and Leonidas ordered them to prepare their breakfast quickly because they would be dining in Hades later – meaning they were going to die. Rather less dramatically (and likely more accurately), Herodotus reports that as they knew they were not going to survive, Leonidas and his men advanced into a wider, less safe part of the pass, along with some allies from Thespiae who refused his orders to leave, and the Thebans, whom Herodotus tells us – perhaps unfairly – that Leonidas kept to ensure Thebes remained loyal to the Greek cause. Many modern commentators think the Thebans who stayed at Thermopylae were most likely loyalists.

The remnants of Leonidas's army fought so aggressively that Herodotus describes them as fighting in a "frenzy" with no regard for their lives. Herodotus even claims the Persian captains had to flog their own men to compel them to face the Spartan onslaught. Perhaps the bravest Spartan that day was a man named Eurytus, who had been struck blind the previous day by an enigmatic disease. Rather than return home, Eurytus ordered his helot to help him put on his armour and lead him to the fighting, where he plunged into the melee and died.

By the time Hydarnes and the Immortals appeared behind them, Leonidas and many of his men had fallen. But they took swathes of brave Persians with them, including two of Xerxes' half-brothers. Many Persians were pushed into the sea, and others trampled underfoot. In a deliberate echo of Homer's *Iliad* – which describes an epic battle against the Trojans for possession of the Greek hero Patroclus's body, where the Greeks force the Trojans back three times – Herodotus reports that Leonidas's men did one better. They recovered their king's body after throwing back the Persians *four* times.

When the Immortals appeared behind them, the remaining Spartans and Thespians withdrew to a small bluff to make a final stand. They lost touch with the Thebans who surrendered to Xerxes, who later had them branded with his royal mark. By now, most of the Spartans had broken their spears and were fighting only with swords or knives, or

ALAMY/AKG IMAGES/BRIDGEMAN/MAP: BATTLEFIELD DESIGN

481
Xerxes (Darius's son) prepares to lead a campaign to conquer Greece. Some mainland Greek cities agree to a joint defence under Spartan leadership.

Spring 480
A 10,000-strong Spartan-led army **abandons its attempt to hold off Xerxes'** forces at a mountain pass at Tempe in Thessaly, as it was too easily circumvented.

Late summer 480
Leonidas attempts to block Xerxes' army at Thermopylae, while Admiral Eurybiades seeks to repel Xerxes' fleet at Artemisium. Leonidas's **failure to hold Thermopylae** forces the Greek army and fleet to withdraw, allowing Xerxes to pass into southern Greece and sack Athens.

Early autumn 480
The **Greeks enjoy a naval victory** at the battle of Salamis.

479
The Greeks are victorious at the battle of Plataea in central Greece, as well as the battle of Mycale in Asia Minor.

469
Athenian general Cimon defeats the Persians on land and sea at the battle of Eurymedon river in Asia Minor, effectively **ending Persian hopes of conquering Greece.**

This fifth-century BC Persian gold coin is believed to show King Xerxes. He wanted to annihilate the Greeks to avenge his father

The naval battle of Salamis, as depicted in a c1862 painting

even their hands and teeth. Still, the Spartans and Thespians proved such formidable opponents that the Persians preferred to shoot them down with their arrows rather than fight them hand-to-hand. The Persians probably really did darken the sky with their arrows in the final moments of battle.

After the fighting was over, Xerxes was still so angry that he cut off Leonidas's head and set it up on a pike. According to Herodotus, Xerxes' losses were so humiliatingly high — some 20,000 men killed — that he was forced to engage in an elaborate charade, leaving the Spartans unburied for all to see, but hiding hordes of his own dead so no one could know just how many Persians had been killed by so few men. But Greek visitors to the site were not fooled, and they noticed many of the 'Spartan' corpses that Xerxes pointed out were in fact their helot attendants.

Years later, Leonidas's remains were repatriated to Sparta, and an annual games was established in his honour. A memorial with a stone lion was set up on the small bluff at Thermopylae where Leonidas's men made their final stand, just as Demaratus warned Xerxes they would. On it was inscribed an epigram by Simonides of Ceos paying tribute to the Spartans' adherence to Spartan law: "Stranger, go tell the Spartans, that here, obedient to their words we lie."

A rousing legacy

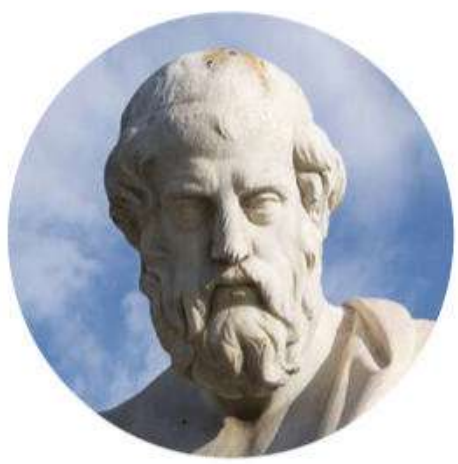
The sheer number of sports teams called 'Spartans', and the popularity of the 2007 film *300*, are the most obvious modern legacies of the Spartans' courageous stand at Thermopylae. But there is so much more.

Leonidas and his 300 came to represent what a Spartan warrior should be. The Athenian historian Thucydides later observed: "It was thought neither force nor famine could make the Spartans surrender their arms, but they would keep them and fight on as long as they were able, to death." This mentality surely explains the fate of the only two Spartans who survived the fighting. Pantites had been sent to Thessaly as a messenger, and when he returned home he was so "dishonoured" that he hanged himself out of shame. The second man, Aristodemus, survived as he suffered from the same eye disease that afflicted Eurytus and chose to return home rather than fight. On his return he was reviled as a "trembler", and no Spartan would even speak with him.

Although Thermopylae was a defeat for the Greeks, Leonidas's doomed last stand for freedom proved inspirational to his fellow countrymen. Later that year, the Athenian admiral Themistocles used Leonidas's strategy of negating Persian numbers at a narrow bottleneck to defeat the Persian fleet

The 2007 film *300* is an obvious modern legacy of the battle of Thermopylae, but "there is so much more"

Leonidas's doomed last stand for freedom proved inspirational for his fellow countrymen



A statue of the Greek philosopher Plato. His works, as well as those of many other great Greek thinkers, would not have existed without the bravery of Leonidas and the Spartans, Andrew Bayliss argues

in the narrow straits off the island of Salamis, near Athens. The following summer, Leonidas's nephew Pausanias led nearly 40,000 Greeks to victory over Xerxes' cousin Mardonius at the battle of Plataea and drove Xerxes' forces out of mainland Greece altogether. Diodorus claims Leonidas and his men were "more responsible" for the Greek freedom than those who fought at Salamis and Plataea because the memory of their deeds "dismayed" the Persians and "incited" the Greeks to emulate their bravery. A prime example of a Greek who was driven by the great courage shown at Thermopylae was Aristodemus, who fell fighting bravely at Plataea after rushing forward in a frenzy.

But Thermopylae's greatest legacy was the so-called 'Golden Age' of Athens that followed. Had the Persians succeeded in permanently destroying Athens they would have snuffed out the fledgling Athenian democracy, and we would not today marvel at the magnificence of the Parthenon on the Athenian acropolis, or be able to read great works of literature by the likes of the historian Thucydides, the playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes, or the philosopher Plato. None of this would have been possible without the inspiration that Leonidas and his men provided in their stand for freedom. In his 1965 essay *The Hot Gates*, Sir William Golding wrote: "A little of Leonidas lies in the fact that I can go where I like and write what I like. He contributed to setting us free." H

Andrew Bayliss is a senior lecturer in Greek history at the University of Birmingham. His most recent book is *The Spartans* (OUP, 2020)

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Sailing to freedom
Refugees board a boat at Antwerp in August 1914. By October, a thousand Belgian refugees a day were arriving in Britain

come guests?

When the first Belgian refugees reached Britain's shores in 1914, fleeing the German invasion of their homeland, they were met with open arms. But as the First World War ground on, relations became increasingly strained. **Alison S Fell** explores their complex experiences

As the first huddle of Belgian refugees prepared to leave their native shores for the British city of Leeds in October 1914, excitement, relief and trepidation laced the air. Sister Marie Antoine, who had been forced to flee when her convent in Willebroeck, a village between Antwerp and Brussels, was attacked by German shells, described the exodus at the dockside in Antwerp: "We took our places on the deck of this little boat… There were seats for about half of the number of passengers, but we crowded together as best we could, with a feeling of security, for we all knew that within a few hours we would be safely out of reach of those terrible bombs and shrapnel." A mere four hours later, after a freezing journey across the sea, "the hills and rugged banks of England made their appearance" – safety was finally in sight.

The British, for their part, were eager to catch a glimpse of these beleaguered victims of war. After all, for most of the population, the arrival of Belgian refugees was their first encounter with the human costs of the First World War. Belgium had announced in July 1914 that it would uphold its neutrality, as guaranteed by Britain, Prussia, France, Austria, Russia and the Netherlands in the 1839 Treaty of London. But by August 1914, the Germans were advancing through the country to reach France. Refugees began to flee in their thousands. On 9 October 1914, the Belgian garrison commander surrendered Antwerp, and by November most of Belgium was under German occupation.

In total, 1.5 million Belgians were displaced, fleeing to France, neutral Netherlands and Britain. By October 1914, after the collapse of Belgian military resistance, a thousand Belgians a day were arriving in Britain. In November the Netherlands asked Britain for food for its Belgian refugee camps. Instead, the government proposed that 5,000 refugees a week be brought to Britain. In a few short months, more than 200,000 Belgians arrived in the country – the largest influx of people in British refugee history.

One of the reasons why the British government was so willing to accept Belgian refugees was decidedly self-serving: the invasion of Belgium was central to Britain's publicly declared reasons for going to war. Britain had guaranteed its military support when the Belgian government refused the demands of the Germans to allow them passage through their country.

Britain also used the invasion to bolster the anti-German sentiment that was brewing among the population. British recruitment

MIRRORPIX/COLOURISATION BY JOHN GALLAGHER– MRJOHNGALLAGHER.COM

posters depicted Belgium as the oppressed victim of a German aggressor who had ridden roughshod over international laws.

Newspaper articles, interviews and photographs all contributed to this image, presenting Belgian refugees as the innocent victims of German brutality. For instance, in Leeds, a front-line reporter called Bertha Bennet Burleigh gave a talk about the situation in Belgium in which she attacked the Germans as barbaric and uncivilised, and condemned the targeting of civilians and the looting of churches and libraries. While there were indeed atrocities committed against Belgian civilians during the invasion, including rape, hostage-taking and murder, these stories were sometimes invented or exaggerated, and the press were instructed not to print negative stories about Belgian refugees.

So it is no surprise, then, that the refugees from 'Gallant Little Belgium' who arrived in Britain were met with open arms. There was an immediate and impressive response by the well-established British charitable sector, led by the War Refugees Committee who agreed to the government's request to coordinate relief work, but who were mainly funded, supported and directed by the Local Government Board. The management of care for the refugees themselves was devolved to local committees, whose ranks were made up of local worthies, including clergymen and wealthy middle to upper-class women.

Waves of invaders German soldiers march across Belgian fields in 1914. The troops committed several atrocities against civilians, although some stories were invented or exaggerated

Contributing to the cause

The Lord Mayor's Belgian Relief Committee in Leeds, for instance, which was responsible for an average of 1,500 refugees throughout the war, was convened by Dorothy Una Ratcliffe – the lord mayor's wealthy 27-year-old niece-in-law. To escape her unhappy marriage, Ratcliffe threw herself into war relief work. And there was much to do in Leeds as dispossessed Belgians poured in to the city. Two hundred and twenty-eight houses were given over to needy refugees, and there was also a hostel for unmarried Belgians and Belgian soldiers who were on leave.

In 1914 and 1915, the British public were greatly supportive of the refugees' plight, and huge sums to cover the cost of caring for the Belgians were donated. The money raised in this period by the Leeds committee alone came to £10,714 (more than £500,000 today), which was supplemented by a further £11,258 in government grants.

Of those Belgians who fled to Britain and required monetary support, around two-thirds were women and children; men of military age continued to be conscripted into the Belgian army throughout the war. Belgian soldiers were subject to military discipline, but refugees were also subject to state control. The 1914 Aliens Restriction Act, initially passed to control German and Austrian residents in Britain, required Belgians to register with the police and inform their local registration office if they were moving address, thus restricting their right to move around Britain freely.

Recruitment drive This c1914 poster used the invasion of Belgium to encourage men to enlist

As the first few months of the war turned into years, the relationship between Belgian refugees and their British hosts fundamentally changed. Belgians gradually shifted in status from 'guests' to 'resident aliens', whose cultural mores were often distinctly different from that of their hosts.

Initially, individual families had taken refugees into their own homes. However, this proved to be only a short-term solution. British families soon found their budgets and generosity exhausted, while Belgian refugees preferred to live independently once they were able to do so.

But for those who did not rapidly become self-sufficient, there was another option for regaining some semblance of independence. Many rambling English houses were converted into hostels, allowing groups of refugees to escape the confines of British families' homes and live together. The records of one such hostel, Heaton Hall near Bradford, reveal how relations between Belgian residents and their British hosts became increasingly strained.

The Heaton Hall Committee was

ALAMY

A helping hand
Dorothy Una Ratcliffe, who convened the Belgian relief committee in Leeds. The committee raised £10,714 to help cover the costs of caring for the displaced Belgians

Belgians gradually shifted in status from 'guests' to 'resident aliens', whose cultural mores were distinctly different

Community spirit
A group of refugees in Barnsley, 1914. Although Belgians at first moved in with British families, many later opted to live with other refugees in hostels

ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN

dominated by older, socially conservative middle-class women and chaired by Alice Priestman: the 62-year-old Quaker wife of a middle-manager in the textile industry, and an experienced visitor at a women's prison. But the realities of work with Belgian refugees was not always as rewarding as the committee members had first hoped. They regularly heard the Belgians' "small petty jealousies" and were regaled with complaints of "one person having had his boots repaired more often than another", for instance, or a lack of tobacco money. In December 1915, the secretary noted the situation had become so fractious that the refugees were "strongly reproved by our [the committee's] chairman". A Flemish speaker called Madame Brule also chastised them, "pointing out that it was very ungracious of them to have petty bickerings when so much has been done for them".

Relations between the Heaton Hall Committee and the refugees continued to deteriorate. In subsequent committee minutes, increasing tensions emerged between the wealthy Yorkshire women of the committee – with their Protestant values and assumed class and moral superiority – and the refugees they were responsible for. The Belgians came from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds and they did not always take kindly to having their behaviour policed and reprimanded by their British hosts.

A culture clash was particularly evident in attitudes towards the consumption of

LIFELONG TIES

These Belgian refugees irrevocably changed the lives of their hosts

1. FORBIDDEN LOVERS

Camille Pluvier fled from Bruges in 1914 aged 14 and lived with the Chackett family in Cannock, Staffordshire. He remained in Britain after the war and began an illicit relationship with the Chacketts' daughter, Clara, until he was drafted into the Belgian army in 1921. The following year, Clara gave birth to a son, Jack, who was brought up by his grandparents believing Clara to be his sister.

Letters Pluvier sent to the Chacketts while he was stationed in Germany and Belgium, where he insisted he was "prepared to do all I can for my dear Clara upon my word and my honour", reveal the sometimes heartbreaking legacies of Anglo-Belgian relationships. One of his letters to Clara's parents begins: "I am sending you this letter to ask you for forgiveness, as I am sorry that I have come over and that Clara is like that. I shall always love my dear Clara and have always loved her."

Some Belgian refugees and their British hosts conducted illicit affairs. For instance, Clara Chackett (above) bore Camille Pluvier's son

Sylvie De Neve – shown here on her wedding day in 1916 – taught embroidery to local Irish women

2. AN ABANDONED CHILD

When Irene Bishop arrived in Hereford she was only four months old. She was later told that she had travelled to the city on a coal boat along with some nuns and other refugees. After a few weeks, Irene was abandoned by her Belgian mother, Charlotte Stewart, whose fate remains a mystery.

The board of guardians placed Irene with the Bishop family, who adopted her and provided her with a secure and loving home. Irene was of mixed heritage, and a DNA test revealed her father probably came from the former Belgian Congo. She had a positive experience of adoption but remained aware of her refugee status. At the outbreak of the Second World War, she was still classified as an 'alien' and feared being interned. Her former social worker intervened, and she joined the Women's Voluntary Service.

A 1915 photograph of Irene Bishop, a Belgian refugee who came to Britain as a baby

3. TALENTED TEACHERS

In October 1914 sisters Sylvie, Jeanne and Izette De Neve finally decided to abandon their thriving family bakery *De Glas Freres*, situated on the market square in Mechelen, and join the growing tide of refugees. They settled in Monaghan, Ireland, after Lady Leslie, Winston Churchill's aunt and chair of the local committee, persuaded a small party of refugees temporarily housed in Alexandra Palace to make another voyage across the sea.

Skilled in needlecraft, the De Neves began to teach local Irish women after being shocked by the poverty of the Irish countryside. They started a small business making and selling Belgian embroidered goods, contributing significantly to the local economy.

Sylvie's granddaughter, Adrienne Czerwin Abbott, says her grandmother was forever in debt to the people of Monaghan for their extraordinary kindness to strangers. Apparently, Sylvie recalled Lady Leslie with special respect, as she saw beyond her great personal grief – her son, Norman Leslie, was killed in October 1914 – to welcome refugees in need. Adrienne still treasures some beautiful examples of their needlework today.

LINDA CHACKETT/ADRIENNE CZERWIN ABBOTT/STUART DOVE

Hard at work
Around 7,000 female refugees were employed in ammunition factories by 1918, including the women pictured here at a London munition works

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alcohol. In July 1915, after a M Lickens was found to have an "illness caused by drink", Mrs Priestman reported that "she had visited the Delvers Arms and requested the proprietress to, as far as was possible, discourage the Belgians from drinking more than a reasonable amount". The temperance movement was strong among the Protestant middle-classes of Yorkshire, but it would have been an alien concept to the beer-drinking Catholic communities of Belgium.

Earning their keep

As the refugees became more of a fixture of British life and the initial interest in them waned, the British population's purse strings began to tighten. In 1916, two years after the first Belgian boats had arrived, both casualty figures and food prices were on the up, and there were many more charitable causes asking for donations from the British public's dwindling resources. Belgian refugee committees across the country faced difficult choices as funds began to run out, and there was mounting pressure on the refugees to find paid employment.

The manpower crisis, especially in 1917 and 1918, meant that there was no shortage of opportunities. By 1918, some 30,000 Belgians were working in ammunition factories, including more than 7,000 women, making it one of the largest foreign workforces in the country. In Elisabethville in Birtley, County Durham, more than 3,000 Belgians worked in and lived near a large munitions factory.

Many Belgians yearned to escape the confines of relief committees and gain a sense of identity beyond that of 'Belgian refugee'

As finances became stretched, the Heaton Hall Committee attempted to get more women into paid employment, to "pay for their keep". This led to a suggestion that Belgian women carrying out the domestic work in the hostel should be paid for their labour at a rate comparable to that which the committee would have to pay a "local charwoman (cleaner)". However, this suggestion was rebuffed by several middle-class Belgian women, who found it insulting that their domestic work could be given an economic value in this way. One woman, a Madame Delgrosso, "attended before the committee and returned the money which she received for work done in the house". The following week, she obtained work in a munitions factory in Bradford. Clearly, being a paid industrial worker was more palatable to her than being given wages for the domestic labour that she had undertaken for free for the previous 18 months.

As the Belgian refugees settled into life as paid factory workers, cleaners and the like, they were increasingly eager to escape the confines of the relief committees. The Belgian press that was published in Britain in both French and Flemish during the war (refugees came from the Walloon and Flemish communities in Belgium) reveals that many yearned to establish greater autonomy for themselves – and, crucially, a sense of identity beyond that of 'Belgian refugee'.

Both discharged Belgian soldiers and Belgian civilians lived in Britain, and the

Two nations Young Belgian refugees wave a British flag during celebrations for Belgian National Day in London during the First World War. Some refugees feared that their children were becoming too anglicised

failure of the British population to distinguish between the two was often the source of complaints. For instance, Jules Barry, a discharged Belgian soldier, wrote a letter to the Leeds committee in November 1915 complaining that he was always referred to as a "Belgian refugee" when he was in fact a disabled soldier, and requested that all official letters should use the correct terminology.

The pages of the French language newspaper *L'Indépendence belge* publicised an increasing number of Belgian-led initiatives designed to maintain their traditional way of life. These ranged from Belgian schools – established because of anxieties that children were becoming too anglicised – theatre groups and choirs, to professional groups, including associations for Belgian lawyers, railway workers, teachers and metal workers.

The desire to preserve Belgian traditions was further strengthened by the unpalatable impression some refugees had of British culture. A 1918 article published by a Belgian refugee in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* attacks the sight of the "'repulsive array of drying underwear spread out on washing day on clothes lines stretched over the streets". The men of Leeds came under scrutiny, too, being lambasted for "their love of the pictures, their going mad over the feats of a footballer, their love of the Charlie Chaplin type".

There were romances between Belgians and their hosts. Some ended in marriage, but others ended in illegitimacy and scandal

While for some British residents, the refugees remained representatives of civilian war victims, for others, longer-term relationships led to Belgians becoming clients, colleagues (or competitors) in the labour market, friends, or, in rarer cases, spouses. Most wartime newspaper reports of marriages involved Belgian refugees marrying other Belgians. But there were romances between Belgians and their hosts, too. Some of these ended in marriage. Others ended in illegitimacy and scandal, which was often hushed up for decades (see page 32).

Yet when the war drew to a close, many of the complex relationships that had formed between the refugees and their British hosts were effectively severed. Rather than remaining in Britain, more than 90 per cent of refugees returned to Belgium. Concerned about the economic fallout of war, the British government actively repatriated them, supported by a Belgian government keen to begin the long task of reconstruction.

In many cases, Belgians were keen to return to their homeland – although they faced a difficult reception when they arrived. Some were treated as cowards who had had an easier time than those forced to live under the harsh conditions of German occupation.

Forgotten friendships

In Britain today, there are few traces of the Belgian refugees. As the vast majority returned to Belgium, there simply aren't many descendants around to tell their stories. And in Belgium, refugee experiences have often been marginalised in national commemorations of the war. Remembrance instead focuses on the suffering of those who remained in Belgium, as well as those who were killed during active military service.

But inscribed furniture, paintings and other objects donated by Belgians to their British hosts bear witness to the warm friendships that existed between individuals and communities. Letters and photographs from the interwar years, preserved in attics and archives, attest to some ongoing ties. In a few cases, there were visits between Belgian and British friends and neighbours that lasted well into the 20th century.

It is only more recently, and especially during the centenary of the First World War, that more evidence has come to light which illuminates the many ways exile affected Belgians – in some cases reverberating down the generations. Through initiatives such as the Tracing the Belgian Refugees project (a free online database that features interviews with refugees' descendants, information from local history groups, and academic research), we can shine a light onto this history and remember the forgotten friendships, enmities and love affairs that bloomed between two societies who were thrust together during the privations of war. H

Alison S Fell is professor of French cultural history at the University of Leeds. She is the principal investigator of the Tracing the Belgian Refugees project: *belgianrefugees.leeds.ac.uk*

VISIT Material from Tracing the Belgian Refugees is featured in IWM London's exhibition **Refugees: Forced to Flee** (part of IWM's wider Refugees season). It is on display until 24 May 2021. Find out more at: *iwm.org.uk/events/refugees-forced-to-flee*

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Celestial knowledge
This 14th-century astrolabe from Spain has inscriptions in Hebrew, Latin and Arabic, reflecting the international nature of scholarship in the medieval period

"I want people to see for themselves how creative and ingenious medieval science was"

The medieval era is often dismissed as a 'dark age' before the glories of the Renaissance. But, as **Seb Falk** explains in his new history of medieval science, this was in fact an age of wonder. He speaks to Rob Attar

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Medieval science is frequently disparaged nowadays. Why do you think that is, and do you feel that it's unfair?
This has a long history. The disparagement of the medieval goes all the way back to the Renaissance, when scholars were trying to recover the learning of ancient Greece and Rome. They saw everything that had come between those times and their own day as being, essentially, irrelevant. And that picture has continued right up to the present day.

The Middle Ages has always been viewed as this mediocre bit in the middle, and it's true that some of the things that people thought in the Middle Ages were wrong – but that doesn't make them less interesting. In my book, I wanted to show how the ideas of the Middle Ages weren't as infertile, stagnant and dark as is often portrayed. This period contributed a huge amount to the development of modern science, including the recovery and the study of ancient texts, the involvement of Islamic texts in western European scholarship and the foundation of the universities and other institutions.

Did such a thing as 'science' exist in the Middle Ages and what would it have been called then?
There was nothing like our modern science, which is a distinct discipline, practised by professionals in purpose-designed spaces such as laboratories and observatories, and which follows well-defined rules. But the word science comes from the Latin root *scientia*, and in the Middle Ages this was any field of knowledge – including things like theology – that was a discipline of serious study.

The idea of science as the study of nature separate from other kinds of intellectual endeavour is a modern concept. But that doesn't mean that people weren't investigating nature – they were doing it in other ways. Some historians argue that medieval people did what we now call science so differently that we shouldn't use the word at all, and instead employ some of the categories that they used: either distinct sciences like astronomy, mathematics or geometry; or grouping them together, as sometimes happened, under the heading 'natural philosophy'.

In the Christian west, natural philosophy was a devotional activity – a way of getting closer to the mind of God. By understanding the world around you, you understood creation and the mind of its inventor. This has led some historians to say that we shouldn't talk about this as being science. But actually, it's similar: they're still looking at the same nature, they're still studying the same stars, they're still using mathematics, they're still reading texts.

We now tend to have a clear divide between religion and science. Does the fact that they were intermingled in the Middle Ages devalue that era of scientific study?
There is this idea that there's been a conflict between religion and science and that the church, as an all-powerful body, got in the way of science. But I think that's the wrong way of looking at it. First of all, the church, in so far as it was controlling anything, had a huge role to play in supporting science, in founding universities. There was a popular metaphor that scholars in the Middle Ages liked to use, which was that there were two books in which one could understand God: you could read about God in scripture, of course, but you could also read about God in the book of nature.

All the way through the Middle Ages, the study of science was done by religious people – by monks in universities – so to boil it down to some kind of conflict is misleading. Now, of course, there were incidents where teachers were disseminating ideas that contradicted the church's teachings. And in those cases, sometimes the church did get involved. But its interventions were sporadic, and the sanctions it implemented often didn't have much effect.

God and nature A near-contemporary depiction of the 14th-century English monk, mathematician and astronomer Richard of Wallingford. Monks were among the leading scientific practitioners during the medieval period

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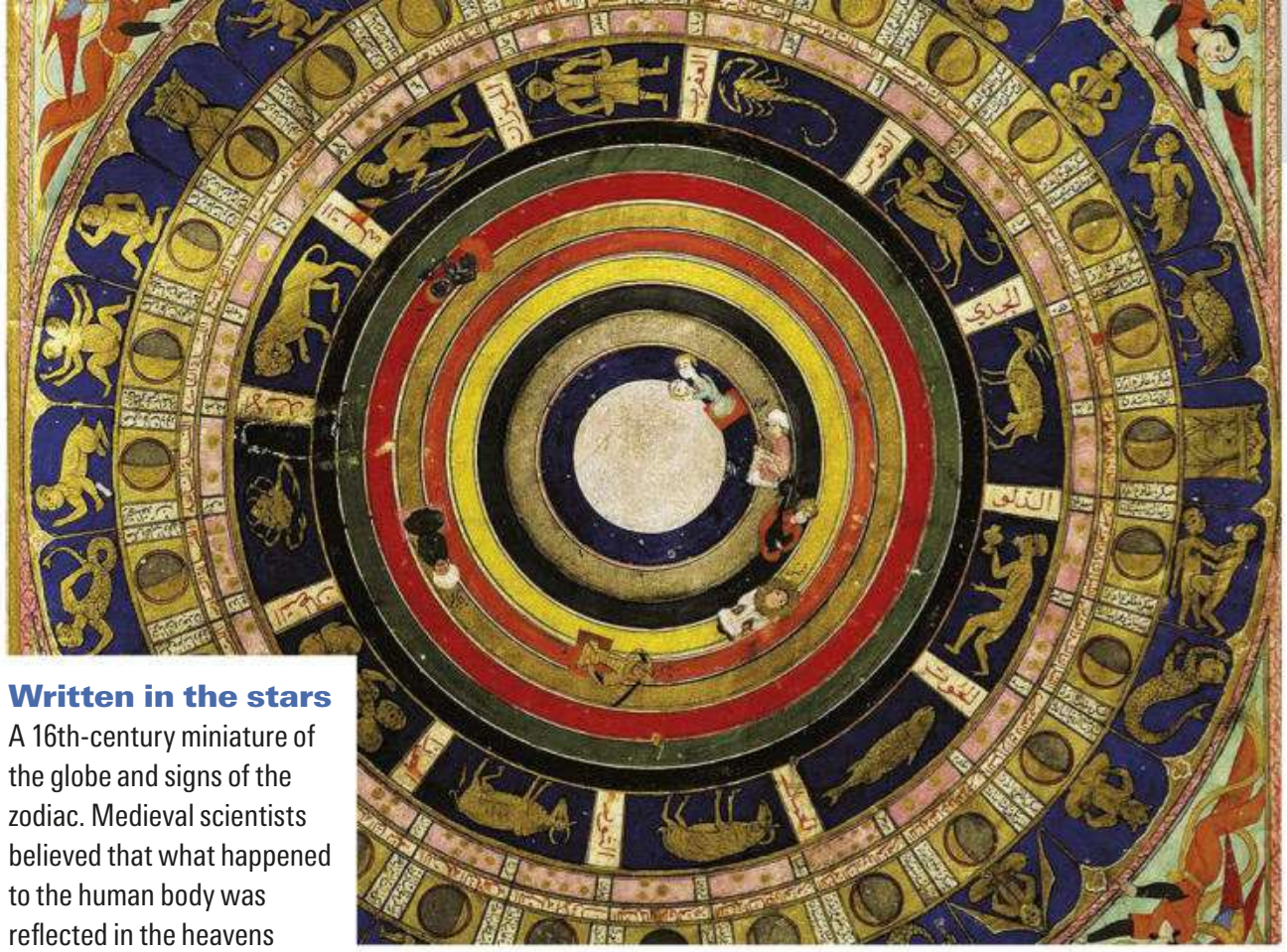
Why was it monks who tended to lead the way in medieval science?
Mainly because they were the most educated. They were literate: primarily to read scripture, but that didn't stop them reading other things as well. And they had access to books, with many of the best libraries being monastic libraries.

Monks were not actually the first people to attend the universities, which developed from the late 11th century onwards. Initially monks tended to want to keep themselves apart from the world and didn't want to be involved in urban life. But that changed with the foundation of the Dominican and Franciscan orders of friars, who eagerly took up university opportunities, wanting to be educated – including in science – in order to preach against heresy. After that, monks saw that they were losing some of their best recruits to these orders and jumped on the bandwagon. Most people who studied at university had some kind of clerical status and there was a real traffic between these institutions and the monasteries.

Science today thrives through knowledge exchanges throughout the world. To what extent did this happen in the medieval era?
This is a really important point: science was hugely international in the Middle Ages. Even before the invention of the printing press, there was still a wide circulation of texts and of scholars. For example, you had the likes of Roger Bacon from England, Albertus Magnus from Germany and Thomas Aquinas from Italy all at the University of Paris at roughly the same time in the 13th century. These universities were hives of intellectual scholars who were all able to communicate because Latin was the international language of scholarship.

There was a huge movement of scholarship in the Middle Ages and a huge desire to translate texts from other languages. The 12th century was the era of a great translation movement, particularly in Spain, where Latin Christians encountered texts from the Islamic world – by Muslims, Jews, and even



Written in the stars
A 16th-century miniature of the globe and signs of the zodiac. Medieval scientists believed that what happened to the human body was reflected in the heavens

Christians, but all written in Arabic. Some of these texts had come from ancient Greece and been stored, translated and studied by Muslim scholars, particularly in and around Baghdad in the ninth century.

Were there any particularly important scientific breakthroughs in the Middle Ages?
Some of the main ones involve the development of instruments: the mechanical clock goes back to the Middle Ages, for example. And there were developments in mathematics and physics such as the Oxford Calculators, where in early 14th-century Oxford techniques were developed for measuring things previously thought unquantifiable, such as temperature and speed. There were also improvements in the understanding of optics and lenses, and the first eyeglasses were invented in the Middle Ages. The wider understanding of rays and the geometry of light was originally an achievement of Muslim scholars, men like Al-Kindi and Ibn al-Haytham, but was picked up eagerly by scholars in western Europe.

Yet it's not just about the contribution that medieval scholars have made to modern science, it's also important to understand how they fitted in to medieval culture, which was a deeply scientific one. In the works of Chaucer, for example, you've got science, you've got astronomy, you've got precise learning. He even wrote an instruction manual for an astrolabe. Science was deeply embedded in medieval art and literature.

Astronomy seems to be an area that medieval people were really fascinated by. Why was it so important to them?
In the medieval mind everything was connected. The basic understanding, which goes back to the cosmology of Plato and Aristotle, is that everything that happens down here on Earth, is a microcosm of the macrocosm – what happens up in the heavens. And so everything that happens in the human body is reflected up in the heavens and your health is dependent on the motions of the planets. This has a real practical impact on people.

Astronomy is also a subject that people were able to observe, predict and make models for in a rational, quantifiable way. It was the first mathematical science and the most scientific science of the Middle Ages. Astronomy fed into everything else. It was at the centre of everything.

Medieval medicine is an area that always fascinates our readers. What's your take on how effective it was?
One of the important rules about studying medieval medicine is that we shouldn't dismiss something that we now see as ineffective. The question is really whether people at the time experienced it as being useful to them. It is fair to say that medicine as a technology had decidedly mixed results, really right up to the early 20th century. Yet the ideas that medieval scholars came up with, and the actions that they took – including public health measures during the plague, which are comparable to today's social distancing rules – are really interesting.

Medieval people understood health in different ways. It is often said that when the plague hit Europe in the 14th century, people just thought they were being punished by God. But this is nonsense. There were really complex views of health, which layer on to a kind of astrological understanding. There was a sense that God was intervening, but people were also aware of environmental causes.

They understood that medicine could itself be the cause of disease – that medicines could have side-effects and doctors themselves could perhaps prescribe medicines that had negative effects on humans. They understood, for example, about lead poisoning and yet we are still suffering the effects of leaded petrol which only came out of our cars a couple of decades ago. There was some complex understanding and subtle knowledge, which I think is often dismissed. Even when medieval people were going to cathedrals and pilgrimage sites to pray for God to cure them, they were also given medical treatments using available herbs and drugs by the monks and priests. There was a huge literature of the study of the effects of different drugs and a huge trade in herbal remedies across Europe.

One thing I think we can learn from medieval medicine – which is something that modern medicine is perhaps only now coming back to – is this idea of the body as a whole. In medieval medicine, if there was something wrong with any one part of the body, it was thought to have been caused by a holistic problem, an imbalance in the body. By contrast, modern medicine said, let's look at individual organs, let's look at individual cells, let's look at the interactions, the chemistry and even the physics of the human body. But in doing so, we lost sight, I think, of some of that holistic view – some of the interaction between physical health and mental health, for example.

"One thing we can learn from medieval medicine is the idea of the body as a whole – for example, the interaction between mental and physical health"

The central figure in your book is the 14th-century English scholar John Westwyk, who is our guide to medieval knowledge. Why is he particularly helpful in navigating this subject?
John Westwyk is a brilliant, fascinating character who had an incredible,

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adventurous life. He was a monk who came from a fairly ordinary background and may have studied at Oxford. At some point he got exiled, we think, up to Tynemouth Priory, on the cliffs overlooking the North Sea, where monks were often sent as a punishment or to prove themselves in an inhospitable environment. Later, he went to Flanders, during the Bishop's Crusade of 1383 where the whole army got dysentery. And eventually we find him in London where he was inventing an astronomical instrument.

Westwyk had this tumultuous life, but, at the same time, he's entirely ordinary and that was a really important point for me. Too many histories of science are parades of great individuals, holding them up as being unique figures, ahead of their time. And that's not how science works, it's not how science has ever worked. In the Middle Ages, so much scientific study was humble, it was anonymous, it was about making incremental advances on the work of earlier scholars.

But John Westwyk was also very useful to me because he was not super advanced and we can see him working out stuff as he goes along. And what I wanted to do in my book was let people learn the science for themselves. There are too many books that tell people how amazing something was, but I really wanted people to see for themselves: to learn how to multiply Roman numerals and how to count to 10,000 on their fingers; to learn how to use an astrolabe or how to cure dysentery. I wanted them to see for themselves how creative and ingenious medieval science was.

Were there many women practising science in the Middle Ages?
Yes, absolutely. Part of the problem that we have is an evidential one, in that men were able to study in universities, while women weren't. Men were also able to practise as physicians and women almost always couldn't. So there's more evidence for men producing science but that doesn't mean that women weren't doing it – and often when we have an anonymous text, I don't think we should discount the possibility that it was by a woman. Meanwhile, there were certain areas, such as in folk healing, where if you didn't have the money, or chose not to consult a qualified university-trained physician, the chances are that you would be treated by a female healer.

And like monks, we also have cases of nuns practising science. I mention in the book the *Hortus Deliciarum* (*Garden of Delights*) by Herrad of Hohenburg, an abbess in Alsace. It's full of really interesting science, of the kind that would be useful to a nun in the abbey in the 12th century. So there definitely are cases of women being involved in scientific study – Hildegard of Bingen, of course, is a very famous one – but they were not generally allowed access to the places where science was being practised.

Divine purpose A compass is depicted as a symbol of God's act of creation in a 13th-century manuscript. The study of nature was seen "as a way of getting closer to the mind of God", says Seb Falk

Coming on to the present day, do you think that, in the future, our own scientific knowledge might be disparaged in the way medieval learning has been?
Disparaging medieval science is a way of making ourselves feel good. It's a way of saying we're not as stupid as them. People have always defined themselves against people – often people in the past – who they thought were stupid or whose ideas they can dismiss easily. And this is a tremendous problem for us today because, if we think of ourselves as having understood everything, then we lose the ability to question, we lose the ability to identify when we're doing things wrong, we lose the ability to improve our ways of studying science.

If we had ever understood everything in science, the scientists could have given up and gone home a long time ago. But science is constantly developing, it's constantly progressing. We have to understand that sometimes that line of progress takes a wiggle, goes down a dead end. And it's really important to see that that's just a normal part of the development of science.

There will certainly be things in today's science that future generations will laugh at. And so I think studying the science of the Middle Ages – apart from recognising their achievements – helps us see that, even where we might now say they were wrong, they were wrong for the right reasons. These were deeply intelligent people, and so if they were wrong, we have to ask how can people be wrong about things for a long period of time? How does science support incorrect ideas? By looking at that, we can learn something about the way that science is done today. H

"Disparaging medieval science makes us feel good. People have always defined themselves against people in the past who they thought stupid"

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Seb Falk is a historian based at the University of Cambridge and a 2016 BBC New Generation Thinker. His new book, *The Light Ages: A Medieval Journey of Discovery*, has just been published by Allen Lane

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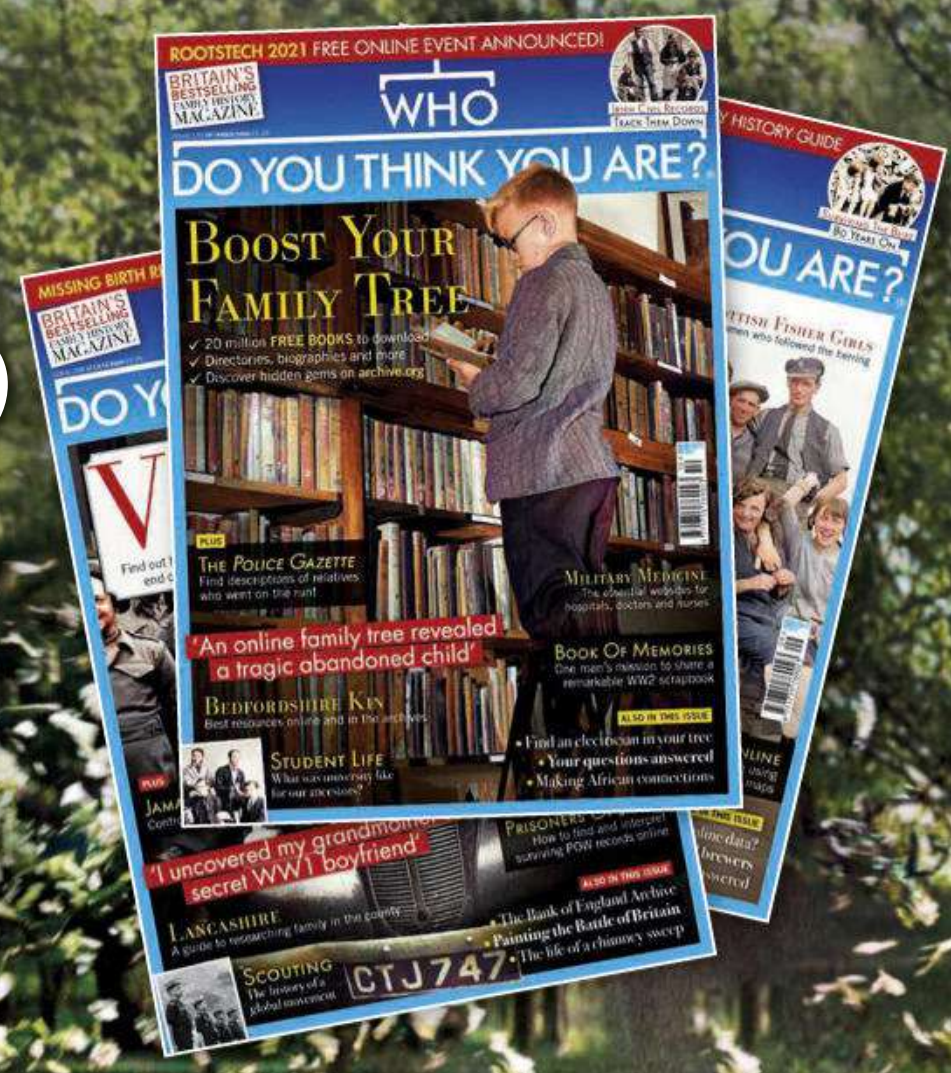
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In the late 19th century, the New York Police Department added a new weapon to its investigative armoury: women. **Elizabeth Evens** reveals how the world's first female detectives snared everyone from murderers to crooked fortune tellers – and made some powerful enemies in the process

"Sherlock Holmes in skirts"

On a crisp New York morning in September 1906, a brewery watchman was patrolling a warehouse in Hell's Kitchen, Manhattan, when he happened upon an unusual cloth sack. He gingerly opened the bag. Inside – to his horror – he found a decapitated torso.

The city had been abuzz with tales of what Pennsylvania's *The Morning Call* dubbed "the darkest murder-mystery New York has faced", when the New York Police Department (NYPD) received a tip about strange comings-and-goings in a tenement house near the brewery. Three brothers lived in one of the tenement rooms: a 10-year-old child and two men, but one of the latter was mysteriously missing. Newspapers detailed how, despite many "revolting murder clews [sic]" incriminating the other adult brother, the police lacked definitive proof.

Officers entrusted the young boy to the care of Ada Murray, a female matron at the local police precinct. One report described how the child "hadn't been talking to her a minute when he blurted out: 'I saw my brother tie up my [other] brother's head in paper and take it out.'" Thousands of New Yorkers reportedly gathered to watch the police wagon take the murderer downtown.

A watchful eye
The New York Policewomen's Reserve, c1918. These women were among the world's first female police officers

They caught the culprit thanks to the matron, with reports from the time implying her intimidating feminine moral presence led the boy to sing like a canary.

Ambitious matrons

Ada Murray, an Irish immigrant, belonged to the first generation of women in policing. Nineteenth-century feminist and temperance organisations had long campaigned to introduce female police officers, arguing they would protect women from the injuries of the criminal justice system. In 1889, New York State legislature answered their calls with a law introducing matrons to all precincts.

Matrons were responsible for the care of the stationhouse and the women and children detained there. During their long shifts, they searched the bodies of arrested women, managed rough sleepers and intoxicated arrestees, responded to medical emergencies and tended to lost children. The NYPD hired mainly working-class white women – as the civil service entrance exam discriminated against African-American applicants – and many matrons were widows with a family connection to policing.

Immediately, policemen began to arrest more women knowing they would enter another woman's custody: matrons were seen as more suited to understanding, handling and questioning female detainees than male officers. In the sixth precinct, for instance, the number of arrests that involved women increased by almost 8 per cent in two years.

Ambitious matrons proved adept at earning the confidence of female or young detainees and assisted on tough investigations. While many enjoyed these opportunities to flex their investigative prowess, those arrested were often less fond of women's new policing role. Mary Sullivan, who joined the NYPD in 1911, claimed "women prisoners very much resented my presence" because she

The police caught the culprit thanks to the intimidating matron, who had caused the boy to sing like a canary

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Mrs. Poor Patient:—"If you're rich, the law don't count."

Double standards

Many NYPD matrons investigated abortion, but they mainly targeted midwives who served immigrant, working-class communities rather than the rich white doctors who tended to the city's elite women. This 1918 cartoon captures the inequality that characterised the police's attitude to abortion

BRIDGEMAN/ LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

ruined the "coquettish role which feminine prisoners and witnesses often like to assume and which the men usually encourage".

By the early 20th century, women had proved themselves skilled investigators. The most celebrated included: Kate Warne, an American Civil War Union spy and one of the famed Pinkerton Detective Agency's best sleuths; Mary Holland, a fingerprint expert and the Chicago police department's top advisor; and Nellie Bly, who went undercover for "Ten Days in a Mad-House" to become the *New York World*'s most famous reporter.

To catch fortune tellers, irregular healers and abortionists, who all commonly catered to female customers, the NYPD relied upon the testimony of female witnesses. Yet, female perpetrators or victims of these crimes often hesitated to testify for fear of incriminating or embarrassing themselves. Enter the policewoman. She could extend the police's reach into female spaces that were beyond male officers' grasps.

Using costumes, telling stories and adopting accents or foreign languages, matrons went undercover to conduct covert surveillance. Mary Sullivan investigated hundreds of fortune tellers – palm readers, clairvoyants, numerologists, hypnotists, and astrologists – who she claimed swindled $125m out of customers every year. Posing as a client looking for answers, Sullivan visited one seeress – the 'Famous Zelia' – whose elaborate headdress concealed a telephone that her colleague used to feed her clues about her customers. She encountered another who searched through the customers' jackets in the waiting room (the matron soon learned to carry her police badge in her purse).

In her autobiography, *My Double Life*, Sullivan revealed that she had a personal connection to these cases. As her mother was sadly betrayed by false predictions, this "made it doubly pleasant to me to flash my badge before an astonished seeress and tell her she ... [was] about to depart for a ride".

The NYPD certainly benefited from policewomen's ability to go incognito. As one 1915 newspaper reported, a criminal "may be remarkably successful at playing the man's game and thereby evade arrest for months and even years, but when he has to match his wits with a woman detective who has a highly developed faculty of concealing her identity, and who possesses a spirit of dauntless courage, he finds himself reckoning with the postulary perfection of the century-old axiom: beware of skirts".

Florid quotes such as this were typical of a press that soon saw in the emergence of female sleuths the opportunity to titillate its readers. In reporting on the arrest of a

Using costumes, telling stories or adopting accents, matrons went undercover to conduct covert surveillance

Woman's touch
Trainee policewomen offer guidance to a woman (centre) in early 20th-century America. Matrons extended the police's influence into female spaces that men could not reach

conman, one newspaper concluded that the investigating matron's "Love Lure Led to Prison". When policewomen testified in trials, lawyers often asked them questions such as "Are you married?" and "How many children do you have?" to scrutinise their morality. It goes without saying that they did not pose the same questions to male officers.

Enemy number one

Historians often refer to early 20th-century New York City as a "melting pot": home to more Italians than Venice, more Germans than Hamburg, and more Irish people than Dublin. In their investigations, police matrons focused on the neighbourhoods in which the city's immigrant populations lived.

In the 1910s, the NYPD assigned a number of experienced matrons to 'Special Squad 2' under the command of Lieutenant 'Honest Dan' Costigan. Investigating abortion was a key duty of the squad. They rarely attempted to arrest the rich white doctors on the Upper West Side who cared for the city's elite women. Instead, their targets were immigrant midwives from eastern and southern Europe, who served immigrant and working-class communities.

Although midwifery itself was not illegal, midwives represented traditional, feminine and self-taught skills that physicians – mainly

MISTRESS OF DISGUISE

The undercover antics of the world's first female detective

"Mrs Goodwin is a Sherlock Holmes in skirts," declared one newspaper the day Isabella Goodwin became the world's first female detective. Although famous in her time, Goodwin came from humble beginnings. One of seven children born to working-class parents, in 1885 she married John Goodwin, a NYPD roundsman. John sadly died 11 years later, leaving her a widow with four young children. To support her family, the following year she joined Mercer Street station as a police matron.

Goodwin started her undercover career investigating healers who promised weird and wonderful treatments to cure her faux ailments. She received "vibrations to cure a headache", "thought therapy" for heart trouble, and "magnetic treatments" for neck pain, gathering evidence and arresting them for practising medicine without a licence.

But sometimes her disguises missed the mark. In a newspaper profile, Goodwin remembered that she "overdid it the first time I got myself up as a servant". Wishing to investigate a well-to-do woman suspected of stealing, Goodwin posed as an Irish woman and applied to the employment agency where the suspect usually got her servants. Unfortunately, the agency said "you'd be too green for her", in reference to the matron's phoney Irish accent. So, she changed tack and posed as a genteel woman instead to meet the suspect in a hotel, which proved a resounding success.

It was in February 1912 that Goodwin solved the case that revolutionised her career. A sum of $25,000 was stolen at gunpoint from two bank clerks transporting the cash via taxicab. The police suspected Eddie 'the Boob' Kinsman, but the trail had gone cold. Their only lead was Kinsman's girlfriend, 'Swede Annie', who was staying in a female dormitory in the city. NYPD leaders looked to Isabella Goodwin to find answers.

The matron "wore a dark, shabby suit, old shoes and hat" when she applied for the job as a maid in the dormitory. She haggled over her wages, so as to seem believable, and set to work. She served three meals a day, cleaned the rooms, and collected rent, all the while conducting police work by listening to the suspect "through the key hole". She eventually learned that Annie had a new dress, which Goodwin traced to a shop and located the stolen bills. Goodwin had "caught a gang of thieves by playing the part of a scrub-woman after men had failed", according to one headline, and her efforts scored her a promotion: at the age of 47, Goodwin became the world's first female detective on a salary of $2,250 per year (equivalent to approximately $60,000 today) – equal to her male counterparts.

Isabella Goodwin in 1912. She went undercover in a variety of domestic roles to catch criminals

Isabella Goodwin continued to work in the NYPD until 1924, when she retired after 28 years of service. Her career inspired her own family — her sister served as a department store detective, and her oldest son equalled his mother's rank in the NYPD — as well as leading the way for other women keen to enter the world of policing.

Beach watch
A policewoman in Chicago checks a woman is not violating the bathing suit-length laws in 1921. Policewomen toured recreational venues to try to control young women

white Anglo men – saw as a threat to their medical monopoly. Doctors were therefore keen to associate midwifery with abortion, which was outlawed, to brand it 'dangerous' and 'illegal'. Like many of the healers or fortune tellers whom policewomen investigated, midwives too represented 'foreign' traditions that the police sought to control. As nurse and reformer Lillian Wald wrote: "Perhaps nothing indicates more impressively the contempt for alien customs than the general attitude taken toward the midwife." Policewomen posed as impoverished mothers who needed abortions because they struggled to care for the children they already had, and approached suspected abortionists. One matron, Adele Priess, was a native German speaker and used her language skills to build trust with immigrant midwives – trust that she then betrayed.

On the one hand, this first generation of women in policing were exploited by NYPD leaders who wished to use their bodies as tools of surveillance but paid them less than stationhouse doormen. But on the other, policewomen claimed a unique authority to oversee women marginalised by class, ethnicity and immigration status.

When policewomen tried to expand their role and arrest the city's elite men, they faced a significant backlash. Inspired by the passage of the suffrage amendment in 1918, New York's mayor hired the first woman to police leadership: deputy commissioner Ellen O'Grady, who led the NYPD's first female unit. She did not last long in post.

In December 1919, O'Grady learned that a pair of millionaires had apparently forced two teenage girls into their car, taken them to their apartments and sexually assaulted them. Immediately, she sent Adele Priess to arrest the suspects. But when she arrived at their apartments, she came across a member of police commissioner Richard Enright's staff, who blocked the arrest. O'Grady wrote to Enright, declaring "it is high time that these millionaires [are] punished for taking pretty children into their apartment for immoral purposes". The alleged rapists never faced charges.

From then on, the commissioner obstructed O'Grady at every turn. A year later she quit, saying: "I could not stay and retain my self-respect and independence. I was forced to resign. There was nothing else I could do."

Blocked at every turn
Deputy commissioner Ellen O'Grady (shown above) tried to bring two alleged rapists to justice but was obstructed by her male counterparts

Patrolwomen toured dance halls, cinemas, beaches and amusement parks to stifle steamy courtships between young couples

Cracking down on vice

In the US, as in Britain, the First World War sparked the introduction of uniformed women to police forces across the country, amidst a moral panic about wartime vice

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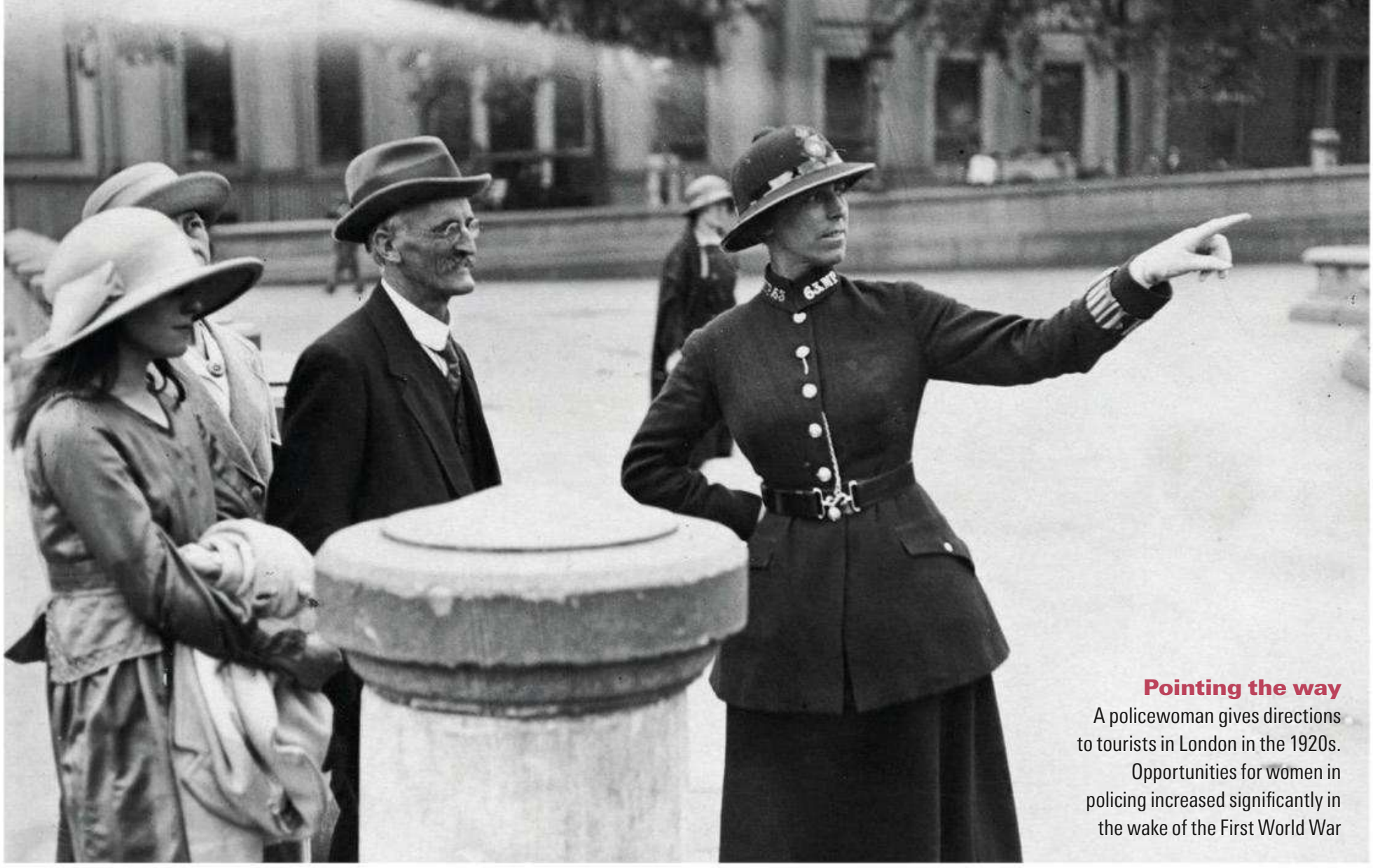

Pointing the way
A policewoman gives directions to tourists in London in the 1920s. Opportunities for women in policing increased significantly in the wake of the First World War

and as men vacated roles to fight in the war. The New York Police Department recruited "patrolwomen" to work alongside matrons with investigative duties, who were officially awarded the title 'policewomen'.

The recruitment drive caused by wartime expansion was also a catalyst for the appointment of the first African-American women to policing. In July 1916, Georgia Ann Robinson joined the Los Angeles Police Department as a volunteer and became a permanent officer in 1919 – the same year that the NYPD appointed Cora Parchment. Police leaders assigned Parchment to watch black communities in Harlem – particularly those residents who had recently moved from southern states to northern cities as part of the Great Migration. However, she resigned after just a few months. While her reasons are unknown, her departure suggests a tension between policewomen's own wishes and the aims of the institution.

During the First World War and then throughout the 1920s, uniformed patrolwomen toured recreational venues such as dance halls, cinemas, beaches, and amusement parks, including New York's Coney Island, to try to stifle unseemly courtships between young couples. Similar patrols of uniformed policewomen began touring recreational spaces in England, too, in an effort to control young women's affection for soldiers, known as 'khaki fever'.

The 1920s also saw the metropolitan police contracting lay women to serve as "decoys", but undercover work did not become a regular duty of English policewomen until the following decade.

When the International Association of Policewomen formed in 1915, it adopted the ethic of "protection and prevention", and this new cadre of policewomen in Britain and the US pitched themselves as "friends to girls" or "municipal mothers". One newspaper expressed high hopes for the modern female officer, who "slips into a crowded dance hall or skating rink at night… and the moment when she sees foolishness about to assume the deadly aspect of vice, glides into the arena with a few quiet words". Apparently, "in nine cases out of ten", the young woman was glad to be "saved from her own folly".

But as these policewomen went around "breaking up flirtations and escorting the young women back home to their mothers", as one American newspaper reported, did these women feel protected? Or did patrolwoman enable the state to interfere in young, working-class and immigrant women's lives in new and controlling ways?

For veteran NYPD officer Mary Sullivan at least, "the excitement, the danger, and the business of matching wits with the criminal element" was the job's main allure. In her autobiography, she echoed her joy at catching dishonest fortune tellers when she wrote: "I've found few things in the world more thrilling than the moment of revealing myself to a trapped and startled crook as a woman detective." The policewoman would "live it all over again if I had the chance". H

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Trailblazing recruit
A portrait of Georgia Ann Robinson. She was hired by the LAPD in June 1919 and was one of the first black female officers

Elizabeth Evens is a historian at University College London. She is working on a book entitled *Regulating Women* that looks at the first women in medicine and law enforcement in the US

Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

When in history did people get the most sleep?

For Elizabethan physician and schoolmaster Thomas Cogan, the amount of sleep that a person enjoyed each night was vital to their physical and mental health. Writing in the 1580s, but drawing on the wisdom of the ancient Greeks, Cogan judged that "seven, eight or nine houres at the most for the continuance of sleep" was sufficient for most healthy adults – anything more was perilous to health.

A recommended average of seven to eight hours' sleep each night has been common across many world cultures in many epochs, but historical sources suggest that the times at which that sleep was taken have differed significantly. Many pre-modern communities, for example, favoured a pattern of 'segmented sleep', in which the night was divided into two distinct sleep cycles – the first and second sleep – which lasted for roughly four hours each. Meanwhile, those living in monastic communities adjusted their sleep patterns to fit in around prayer cycles.

While we can recover a great deal of historical advice about sleep, it is much trickier to find out how long different people *actually* slept for – their bedtimes probably varied according to their state of health and personal preferences, just as ours do today.

Sasha Handley, author of *Sleep in Early Modern England* (Yale University Press, 2016)

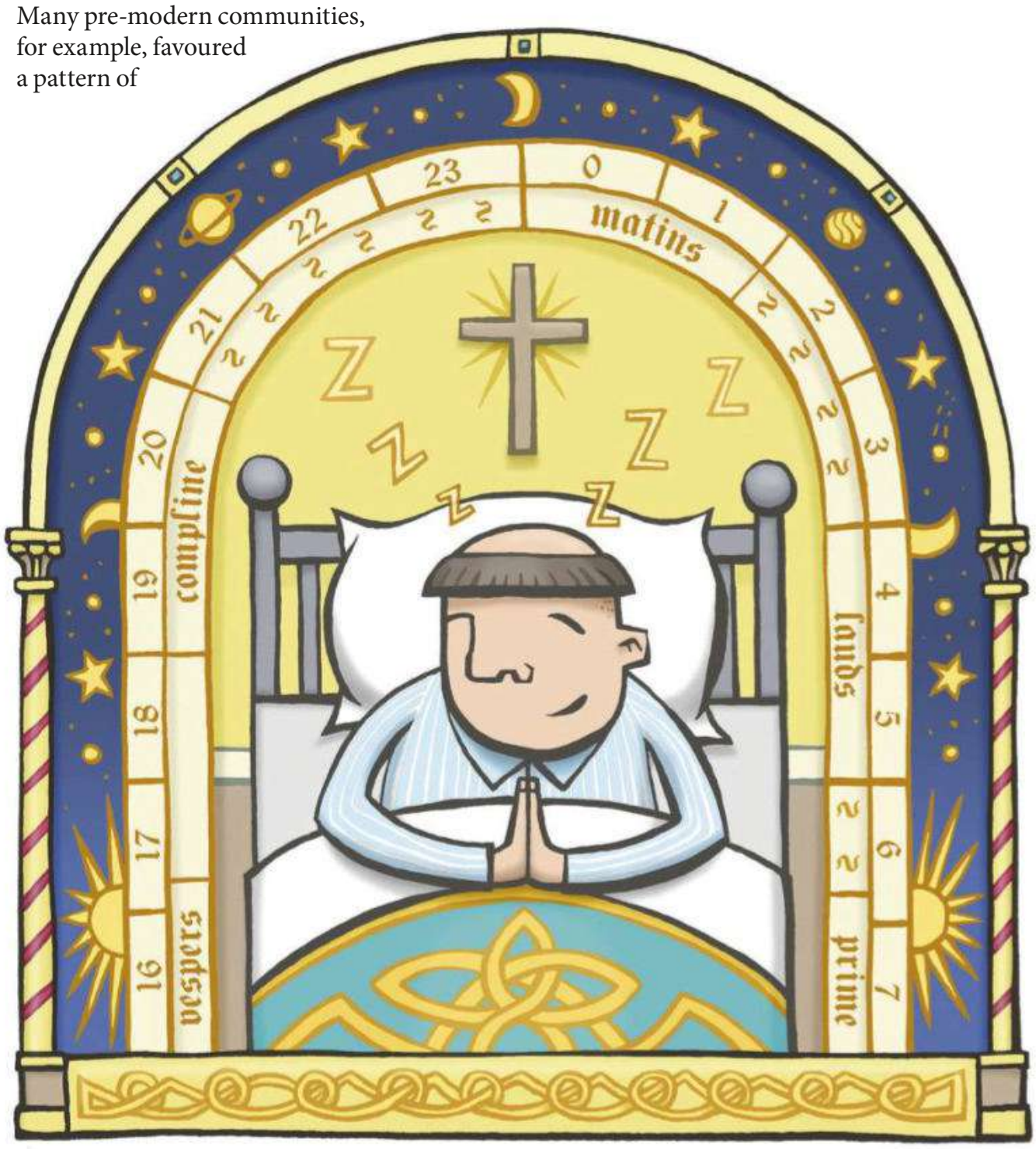


ILLUSTRATION BY **GLEN MCBETH**

Mercury chloride tablets from the early 20th century – a potentially deadly 'cure' for syphilis

What was history's most dangerous medicinal cure?

I would nominate mercury, used as the primary treatment for syphilis until the early 20th century.

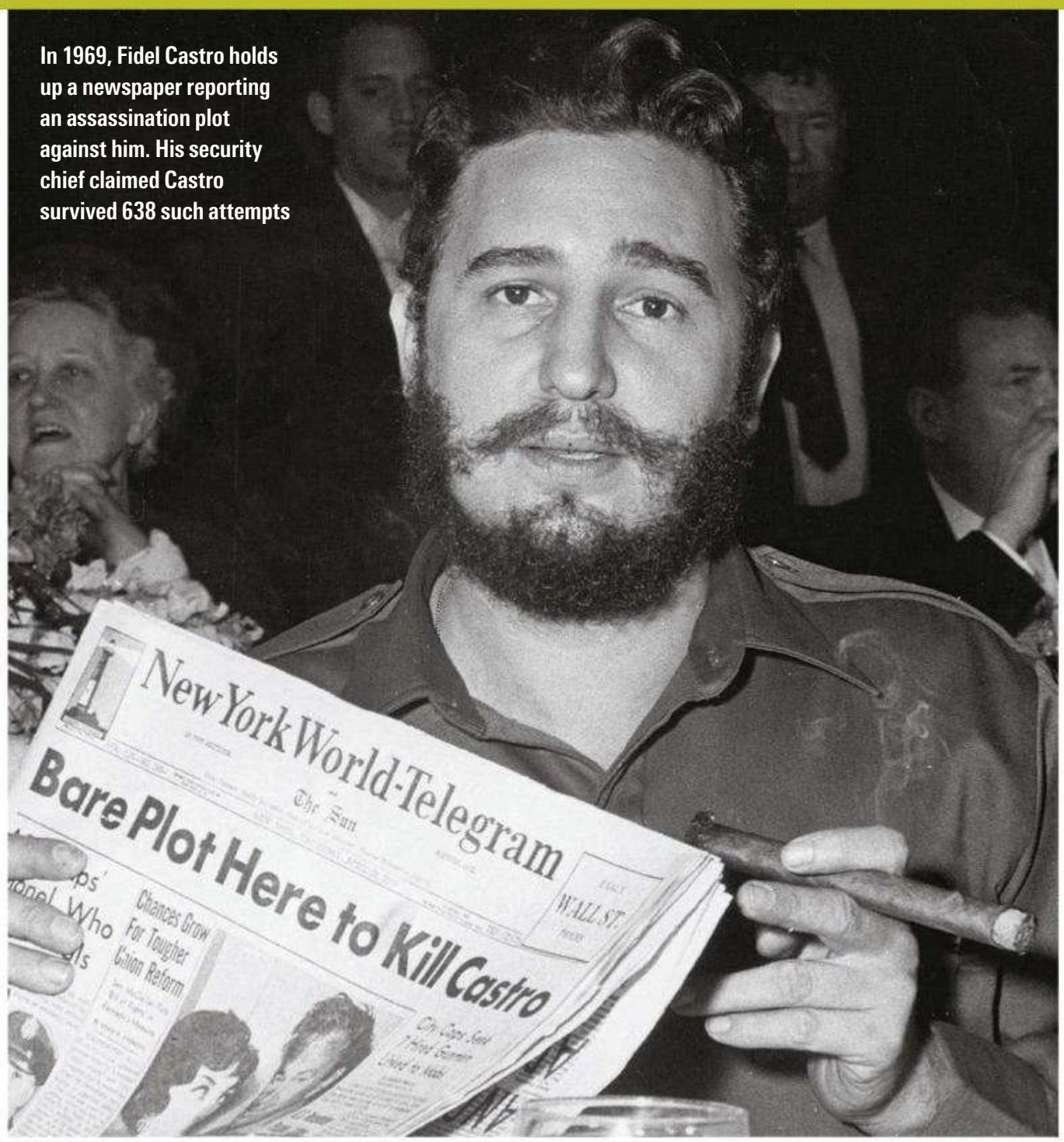
Before the discovery of penicillin, syphilis was an incurable disease. Its symptoms were as terrifying as they were unrelenting. Those who suffered from it long enough could expect to develop unsightly skin ulcers, paralysis, gradual blindness, dementia and 'saddle nose', a grotesque deformity that occurs when the bridge of the nose caves into the face. So prevalent was syphilis in the 19th century that 'no nose' clubs popped up around London, in which people gathered together to celebrate the fact that their noses had fallen off due to the ravages of the disease.

Pre-20th-century treatments often involved the use of mercury, which could be administered in its elemental form or as a compound known as calomel (mercury chloride). Steam baths were also used as it was thought to induce salivation and sweating, which some physicians believed would help eliminate the 'syphilitic poisons'. During the bath, a mercury ointment was rubbed onto the skin of the patient. Treatments could go on for months or even years, giving rise to the phrase, "One night with Venus, a lifetime with Mercury".

Unfortunately, the side effects from mercury could be as painful and debilitating as syphilis itself. Many patients who underwent these various treatments suffered from extensive tooth loss, ulcerations, kidney failure, and neurological damage. Some died from mercury poisoning before the disease could kill them.

Lindsey Fitzharris, author of *The Butchering Art* (Bodley Head, 2017)

WELLCOME COLLECTION



In 1969, Fidel Castro holds up a newspaper reporting an assassination plot against him. His security chief claimed Castro survived 638 such attempts

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

Who in history survived the greatest number of assassination attempts?

The usual answer that's given to this question is Fidel Castro, former Cuban president. Castro's security chief claimed the president had lived through 638 attempts, mostly by the CIA and its proxies. Some of the supposed plots were fabulously bizarre – exploding cigars; a pen with a concealed needle for injecting a toxin; an exploding seashell for when Castro went scuba-diving.

A senate report in 1976 only found evidence of eight CIA bids, and while there were certainly more, it's hard to separate fact from fiction, propaganda and, in Castro's case, legend.

Assassins have become more numerous in the last 200 years. While political murder is as ancient as humankind, its frequency increased exponentially with the onset of democracy and ideological politics, and with technological advances – guns and bombs – that don't require the killer to approach the victim (or their bodyguards) so closely.

If you assume that Castro's claimed 638 attempts is a gross exaggeration, then Muammar Gaddafi might be another contender, having faced a very large, but unknown, number of attempts on his life by political dissidents, Islamists and western armed forces.

Another possible is King Zog I of Albania (reigned 1928–39), who allegedly survived at least 55 attempts. He died in bed in exile aged 65, his 200-a-day cigarette habit succeeding where hundreds of Albanians who had sworn a blood feud against him had failed.

More boringly, though, the answer could technically be a US president from the last 100 or so years. Presidents attract many enemies (and unstable individuals) but the resources of the American security services frustrate numerous assassins well in advance.

Eugene Byrne, author and journalist specialising in history

DID YOU KNOW...?

Loaf sentence

In medieval London, the initial punishment for a baker who sold adulterated bread was to be drawn through the city on a hurdle with the faulty loaf hanging around his neck. According to the 1419 *Liber Albus*, a rulebook compiled by John Carpenter, town clerk of London, the offender should be hauled along the streets from the Guildhall to his own house. A second transgression meant the pillory; a third that the baker had to "forswear the trade… for ever".

Stick your neck out

An American vaudeville performer in the 1920s named Clarence Willard was able to increase his height from 5ft 9ins to 6ft 4ins during his act. Billed as 'The Man Who Grows', Willard would invite an audience member, apparently taller than he was, to stand by him on stage. He would then expand his body until he overtook the volunteer. No trickery was involved. Willard simply had an extraordinary, indeed unsettling, ability to stretch his neck vertebrae at will.

A brand is born

The soft drink Fanta was first created when a trade embargo on Nazi Germany prevented the import of ingredients needed for the original Coca-Cola. In 1940, the US imposed trade restrictions on the Nazi regime and Coca-Cola syrup became unavailable. Max Keith, head of Coca-Cola Deutschland, created a new beverage using only German ingredients. During a brainstorming session to name it, he urged staff to employ 'imagination' (*fantasie* in German), and a brand was born. H

Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history

Fanta – seen here in a German advert from 1970 – was born due to trade restrictions in the Nazi era

The war that plunged Europe into a nightmare

Toxic inheritance
In this allegory of France in 1870, the beleaguered nation is engulfed by the chaos and cruelty of the Franco-Prussian War. The conflict made militarism the dominant ideology in Germany, and fostered a burning desire for revenge in France

The Franco-Prussian War, which erupted 150 years ago, gave rise to a grudge match that would send a continent hurtling towards two world wars. **Michael Rowe** tells the story of a 19th-century conflict that had catastrophic consequences for the modern world

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On 7 October 1870, Léon Gambetta, strong-man of the French government, escaped from Paris in a gas balloon. The Franco-Prussian War had by then been raging for almost three months, and German forces were besieging the city. Gambetta hoped to raise new armies in the provinces to relieve the capital. It was an act of desperation, indicative of how low the fortunes of France had sunk.

Over the following weeks things got worse, with ordinary citizens in France's famous capital reduced to eating cats, dogs, rats and horses. Memoirs and letters are full of debates over the relative merits of exotic meat sourced from the zoo, such as camel, antelope or elephant. Rats from breweries were (unsurprisingly) said to taste better than those caught in the sewers. Meanwhile, unscrupulous entrepreneurs started to peddle bizarre substitutes for basics like milk.

Emperor Napoleon III was primarily responsible for this disaster. A nephew of the great Napoleon who had conquered most of Europe, Napoleon III had made himself emperor of the French following a coup in 1852. Victor Hugo famously dismissed him as "Napoleon the Small", but the French people expected great things of him. Nor were his achievements negligible: he rebuilt Paris, creating the city we know today; and he reasserted French pre-eminence by defeating the Russians (with British help) in the Crimean War of 1853–56, and the Austrians in 1859, allowing for Italian unification.

Napoleon III was mid-19th-century Europe's great disruptor. Unfortunately for him, and for France, an even greater disruptor emerged east of the Rhine, in the large German state of Prussia. His name was Otto von Bismarck.

Basket case A balloon in Paris, September 1870. As the Prussian siege intensified, this became the only way of getting mail and people out of the city

When Bismarck became prime minister in 1862, Prussia was the weakest of Europe's 'great' powers, just one of a patchwork of states that were yet to coalesce into the German empire. But its king, William I, was determined to rectify this through far-reaching military reforms, and appointed the maverick Bismarck to ram them through a reluctant Prussian parliament. Upon his appointment, Bismarck made his views clear in one of history's more famous soundbites: "The great questions of the day are not decided through speeches and majorities… but by iron and blood."

Bismarck and Napoleon had a great deal in common. Both were conservative populists, and both recognised that the new force of nationalism sweeping Europe was something to be exploited rather than feared. Yet their attempts to harness this nationalist fervour set them on a collision course, one that would end in conflict.

The Franco-Prussian War, as that conflict is now known, was over in 10 short months, but its consequences were extraordinarily long-reaching. In a victorious and newly unified Germany, it helped make militarism the dominant ideology; in a defeated and humiliated France, it fostered a seething desire for revenge. These toxic ingredients set the scene for further bouts of bloodletting – on a far greater scale – in the following century. It's surely safe to say that without Napoleon and Bismarck's battle for supremacy in 1870, Europe's 20th century would have followed a very different trajectory indeed.

Napoleon's wake-up call

The countdown to the Franco-Prussian War started with another war: that of 1866, when Prussia's newly reformed army crushed Austria in seven weeks. This vindicated Bismarck at home and was a wake-up call to Europe. Prussia became the dominant power in central Europe and the other German states now looked to Berlin, not Vienna, for leadership.

This terrified France. Napoleon III's initial panic response was to re-establish French prestige by annexing Luxembourg or even Belgium. He sought Bismarck's agreement, but was rebuffed. Then, in 1868, a new European crisis started with the overthrow of Spain's Queen Isabella II. Spain needed a new monarch and, as was often the case in this period, chose a member from one of Germany's innumerable princely houses. Unfortunately that choice, Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern, was related to Prussia's William. Not surprisingly, France went ballistic when this

BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES/TOPFOTO

TIMELINE **Clash of the titans**

19 July 1870
Following four years of deteriorating relations, and as a direct consequence of a succession crisis in Spain, **France declares war on Prussia**.

18 August 1870
The battle of Gravelotte-St Privat – the largest and bloodiest engagement of the Franco-Prussian War – sees France's most powerful army trapped in Metz.

1–2 September 1870
At the **battle of Sedan**, another French force is compelled to surrender by a German army, resulting in the **capture of Napoleon III**.

4 September 1870
The defeat at Sedan triggers the establishment of a French Government of National Defence. This regime change in Paris marks the **end of the Second Empire**.

19 September 1870
The siege of Paris begins. Following their victory at Sedan, German forces march west and encircle the French capital.

The overthrow of Spanish queen Isabella II set France and Prussia on a course for war

Bismarck (right) talks with Napoleon III following the latter's capture at the battle of Sedan

A butcher sells cat and dog meat as the Prussian siege starves Paris

The great disruptor
Otto von Bismarck pushed through radical military reforms and, in doing so, made Prussia a European powerhouse

The forward thinker
Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke exemplified Prussian military strategy: far-sighted with a huge attention to detail

The failure of France
French emperor Napoleon III's attempts to snuff out Prussia's expansionist ambitions ended in disaster for his nation

knowledge went public in July 1870. Napoleon III's government, goaded by domestic opinion, tried to save face by forcing Prussia into vetoing the arrangement. King William was happy to oblige the French, as he had never liked the prospect of a close relative ruling an unstable country like Spain.

There things might have rested, but for the French then overplaying their hand. The French ambassador to Prussia met William at the spa resort of Bad Ems (13 July) and attempted to force a public climbdown, pressing him to block any future Hohenzollern candidacy. This backfired when William politely rebuffed the ambassador.

Bismarck was not present at Bad Ems, but had remained in Berlin, where an account of the exchange reached him in the so-called Ems telegram. Bismarck, in full knowledge of the likely consequences, then edited the telegram, deleting the diplomatic niceties, and released it for publication in the international press. This was Bismarck's famous red rag, waved at the Gallic bull. The French duly rose to the bait and declared war, amid feverish jubilation on the streets of Paris.

The Franco-Prussian War, despite its name, saw France pitted against a coalition of German states who sided with Prussia. Their inhabitants increasingly saw themselves as fellow Germans and viewed the war against France as a national crusade. Prussia nonetheless provided the overwhelming majority of German forces, as well as the military leadership.

In technological terms, there was little between the belligerents: the French had better infantry rifles, the Prussians superior artillery. What gave the Prussians a decisive advantage was their numerical superiority at the outset, gained by very fast mobilisation, and above all superior military leadership.

"No battle plan ever survives contact with the enemy." So stated Helmuth von Moltke,

Both Napoleon and Bismarck believed that nationalism was something to be exploited rather than feared

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27 October 1870
The French army besieged at Metz since August **capitulates to German forces**.

18 January 1871
King William I of Prussia is proclaimed German emperor. This follows the official foundation of the German empire on 1 January – and, as an additional humiliation of France, occurs in the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles.

28 January 1871
The armistice of Versailles. The French Government of National Defence and Germany agree a ceasefire, suspending hostilities and facilitating national elections in France that take place on 8 February.

18 March 1871
Insurgents, dissatisfied with the new French regime, **establish the Paris Commune and seize control of the city**. They rule the French capital, until they are defeated by government forces during the 'Bloody Week' of 21–28 May 1871.

10 May 1871
French and German officials ratify the **Treaty of Frankfurt**, officially concluding the Franco-Prussian War.

William I, king of Prussia and emperor of a united Germany

Government forces clash with members of the Paris Commune as civil war breaks out in the French capital

ALAMY

Bloody victory
Sisters of Mercy assist the wounded at the battle of Gravelotte. The casualty rate in this, the bloodiest battle of the Franco-Prussian War, was a portent of 20th-century conflicts

In just one 20-minute period, the Prussian Guard Corps alone suffered 8,000 men killed or wounded

the Prussian commander in 1870. Moltke was a new kind of military leader, more manager than charismatic warlord. He presided over the Prussian General Staff, an institution that planned operations and contingencies in peacetime. The regular rotation of staff officers back to their regiments ensured that best practice was spread throughout the army, which meant the overall commander could safely delegate to those best placed to seize opportunities that unfolded once hostilities commenced. This was the answer to the problem highlighted in Moltke's quote above. Neither the French, nor other armies, operated in this way, and this showed in 1870.

Superior planning and numbers allowed the Prussians to concentrate along France's eastern frontier. The French, without proper plans, quickly suffered setbacks and these destroyed the morale of Napoleon III, who had unwisely assumed personal command. The only sensible option for the French was to fall back and regroup, but Napoleon could not afford to lose face by retreating. The consequence was a series of major French defeats, starting with Gravelotte-St Privat on 18 August. This would prove the bloodiest engagement of the war, with a casualty rate that was a portent of 20th-century horrors. In just one 20-minute period, the Prussian Guard Corps alone suffered 8,000 men killed or wounded, due to an unholy combination of fast, modern weaponry and outdated attack styles involving massed ranks of men. At least the widespread introduction in this war of 'dog tags' – discs worn by soldiers that included their basic details – allowed for the identification of the dead.

Despite horrific losses at Gravelotte-St Privat, the Prussians won, thanks to superior artillery and better manoeuvring. Moltke then trapped most of the French army in the fortress of Metz. Political pressures intervened again on the French side and demanded a rescue effort. This resulted in the battle of Sedan (1–2 September), a second catastrophic French defeat in which Napoleon III himself was captured. News of this debacle reached Paris a few days later and caused regime change. The new republican

Cold war
Franc-tireurs engaged in combat. As the Franco-Prussian War became increasingly messy and merciless, these irregular volunteers prosecuted a guerrilla war against the invading German troops

The hard core
The new German empire is proclaimed at Versailles in 1871, as depicted in a contemporary painting. One of the primary legacies of the Franco-Prussian War was the creation of an expansionist powerhouse at the heart of Europe

BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY

Government of National Defence filled the political vacuum and proclaimed a war of national resistance.

The Franco-Prussian War now entered a new phase. Prussian forces advanced on Paris, which they besieged from 19 September. The French capital was too strong to be taken by storm, so needed to be starved into submission. While Léon Gambetta escaped to the provinces and raised new armies, irregular volunteers, known as *Francs-tireurs*, engaged in guerrilla tactics. The Prussians did not recognise them as legitimate combatants and shot them upon capture, burning down villages suspected of harbouring them.

This messy, dirty war dragged on for the remainder of 1870, to the discomfort of Bismarck who feared international opinion was swinging in favour of France. However, the defeat of Gambetta's new armies in December meant that Paris was not going to be relieved, and with food running out there was no option but to seek a truce (28 January 1871) which ended the fighting. This created the conditions for French elections to be held, which produced a government with the authority to conclude a preliminary peace on 26 February. Though the new regime's grip on power was threatened by the so-called Paris Commune, which briefly seized control of the capital in March, it nonetheless ratified the definitive Treaty of Frankfurt on 10 May.

A new leaf French president Charles de Gaulle with German chancellor Konrad Adenauer in Paris, 1963. Both men, sons of Franco-Prussian War veterans, advocated greater co-operation between their nations

TOPFOTO

Militarism off the leash

Few who ratified the Treaty of Frankfurt could have guessed the immense impact that the Franco-Prussian War would have on the continent of Europe – an impact that was, in the estimation of future British prime minister Benjamin Disraeli, greater than the French Revolution. Geopolitically, Europe went from having a 'soft' centre, made up of lots of small separate states, to one with a hard core: impressed by Prussia's military leadership, and driven by public opinion, Germany's smaller states agreed to cede their independence to Berlin and form a single entity, the German empire. The big question that arose –and persists – is how such a powerful state can operate within the wider family of European nations.

Initially, things worked well enough. Bismarck used his undoubted political talents to preserve peace. However, when he fell from power in 1890, the more pernicious legacies of the 1870 war came to the fore, including militarism. All major powers in the late 19th century were militaristic, but newly unified Germany was more so than most. Prussia's army, which formed the core of Germany's military, emerged from the 1870 war with immense prestige. With Bismarck gone, no civilian leader had the stature to challenge its primacy. In Germany and across Europe, the military planner was let off the leash.

Disraeli argued that the Franco-Prussian War had a greater impact on Europe than the French Revolution

For France, defeat came as an awful shock made worse by the harsh treaty that followed, which inflicted the loss of the region of Alsace and part of Lorraine, and the payment of a large reparations bill. This humiliation nurtured a desire for revenge. A generation of schoolchildren grew up taught of the injustices of the peace settlement. In the 1890s, France exploited wider European unease at German power by creating an alliance, which in turn made Germany feel cornered.

This combination of militarism and bitterness created the perfect conditions for the next round of Franco-German conflict, the First World War, which on this occasion dragged in the rest of the world. Tragically, the millions of lives lost between 1914 and 1918 resolved nothing – and it was only after countless more died in the Second World War that the architects of Franco-German reconciliation built an edifice that still dominates Europe's political landscape.

Chief among these architects were West Germany's chancellor Konrad Adenauer and French president Charles de Gaulle. Both had fathers who fought in the Franco-Prussian War. Both originated from regions that bordered each other's nations, and which had been contested throughout the centuries. There may or may not have been a sentimental dimension to their thinking.

The two statesmen also calculated that partnership within a European framework would enhance their ability to influence world events now largely shaped by the two new superpowers, America and the Soviet Union. This is what Adenauer meant when he told one of his French interlocutors that "Europe will be your revenge" shortly after the Suez debacle of 1956, when the US forced France and Britain to back down.

Both de Gaulle and Adenauer recognised the futility of the cycle of Franco-German wars initiated a century previously, and on 22 January 1963 concluded the Élysée Treaty, ushering in a new period of Franco-German friendship. Within this treaty's framework other initiatives have flowed, designed to extend the relationship from the level of the state to society more broadly, through ideas such as youth exchanges, town twinning and joint history textbooks for schoolchildren. Within these textbooks, the Franco-Prussian War is not forgotten, but rather treated as a shared historical experience.

For Europe more broadly, including Britain, the Franco-German partnership as it now stands raises its own questions. Other European countries fear marginalisation when key decisions are essentially agreed beforehand by Paris and Berlin. Deeper integration is proposed as the best way of empowering these other states, and at the same time resolving the issue first created in 1870: how to run a continent with such a hard core. However, this integration process has spawned its own set of problems. Seen in these terms, it is clear that the legacy of the 1870 war still helps determine our continent's everyday politics and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. H

Michael Rowe is reader in European history at King's College London

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Fires of change This retouched photograph shows the dome of the Reichstag building filled with fire on 28 February 1933. The arson attack sparked huge controversy and was at the centre of two opposing conspiracy theories

The spectre of conspiracies

From the 'stab in the back' to Hitler's escape from the bunker, conspiracy theories swirl around the Nazis. But how far do they really help us understand the Third Reich?

BY **RICHARD J EVANS**

GETTY IMAGES

The idea that nothing happens by chance in history is as old as history itself. For a significant number of people, nothing is quite what it seems to be at first sight; everything that occurs is the result of the secret machinations of malign groups of people manipulating events from behind the scenes. Conspiracy theories seem to be growing more popular and more widespread in the 21st century: powered by the rise of the internet and then social media; enabled by the declining influence of traditional gatekeepers of opinion such as newspaper editors and book publishers; and encouraged by the spread of the uncertainty about truth and falsehood encapsulated in the perverse concept of 'alternative facts'.

Go on to social media and you will quickly realise how widespread conspiracy theories about key events in history have become. They have even found their way into television programmes, not just in fictional form, but in presentations that claim to pursue the 'real' truth that has up to now been suppressed by 'official' historians, or in other words, those who teach and research the past as a profession at universities and historical institutes.

Few topics in history have attracted more conspiracy theories than Nazism. Conspiracists have focused on events such as the Reichstag fire in 1933, the flight of Rudolf Hess to Britain in 1941, and the death of Hitler in Berlin in 1945. And it is often claimed that the Nazis themselves were influenced by conspiracy theories such as the 'stab-in-the-back' theory of Germany's defeat in World War I, or the infamous Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

But, broadly speaking, the Nazis were not particularly obsessed with conspiracy theories themselves. Compared with Stalin, who saw plots and cabals everywhere and manufactured fake conspiracies supposedly hatched by some of his closest 'Old Bolshevik' comrades so that he could rid himself of potential rivals, Hitler was relatively disinclined to believe in conspiracies. He was, in 1944, forced to admit that Colonel von Stauffenberg's unsuccessful attempt to blow him up on 20 July 1944 was part of a wider conspiracy, but this was something of a unique occasion.

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion (below) was exposed as a fake in 1921, but anti-Semites still claimed it revealed a dark truth about Jewish people

While Stalin had many rivals in the Communist party before he took supreme power, Hitler was unchallenged within the Nazi party from the outset. He enjoyed the unconditional allegiance of the second rank of Nazis, including Hermann Göring and Joseph Goebbels. True, the stormtrooper leader Ernst Röhm did aim to push on for a "second revolution" against Hitler's wishes after the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, but far from being a conspirator, Röhm was quite open about his intentions. This was why Hitler could dispose of him so easily in the infamous Night of the Long Knives in 1934 by having him arrested and shot.

However, Hitler did, of course, subscribe to one major conspiracy theory: the conviction that Jews, everywhere, were intent on destroying Germany and indeed the 'Aryan race'. Students of conspiratorial thinking have termed this kind of belief a systemic conspiracy theory, in which a single secret organisation carries out a wide variety of activities with the aim of taking control of a country, a region or even the world. Conspiracy theories of this type are often hatched over a long period of time – sometimes centuries.

The systematic conspiracy theory found its classic expression in the notorious forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This text emerged in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century and was widely translated and reproduced in the explosion of anti-Semitic propaganda that followed the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the defeat of Germany in the First World War.

The *Protocols* have been accorded an extraordinarily powerful, demonic influence in the 20th century. They have been described, as in the title of the classic study by Norman Cohn, as a *Warrant for Genocide*, inspiring Hitler to launch the extermination of Europe's Jews. Yet anyone who takes the trouble to read them will quickly realise how intellectually and rhetorically feeble they are.

The *Protocols* purported to be the minutes of a meeting held by a secret cabal of Jews to plot the takeover of the world through ideologies such as liberalism and socialism, anarchism and Freemasonry, and the destruction of the social order. They contain neither the tropes of traditional anti-Semitism, such as the supposed ritual murder of Christian boys or the desecration of the Host (the wafer that Catholics believe contains the body of Christ), nor the racist clichés of modern anti-Semitism, with its hate-filled diatribes against racial mixing. They were exposed in 1921 by the Constantinople correspondent of *The Times*, Philip Graves, as a clumsy plagiarism of a 19th-century French satire and other sources.

None of this mattered very much to hard-core anti-Semites, though. Hitler dismissed the question of the genuineness or otherwise of the *Protocols* as irrelevant. Rather than confront the evidence head-on, he declared

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the fact that the "Jewish press" (by which he meant, rather strangely, *The Times*; for Hitler, all liberal newspapers were 'Jewish', since liberalism itself was 'Jewish') had tried to discredit them proved they must be genuine. And even if they were forged, they all the same revealed a deeper truth about the Jews. "What matters," he announced, "is that they uncover, with really horrifying reliability, the nature and activity of the Jewish people, and expose them in their inner logic and their final aims. But reality provides the best commentary."

The key fact was that they purported to be the minutes of a secret meeting of Jewish elders in 1897, and so emanated from what anti-Semites understood to be the Jewish community itself. This enabled anti-Semites to cite them as "proof" of the Jews' subversive intent. Few people probably bothered to read the actual "protocols"; insofar as they were relevant to modern anti-Semitic beliefs at all, it was because of the chapter headings, commentaries and explanatory notes added by later editors.

From the point of view of their actual content, as officials in the ministry of propaganda advised their boss, Goebbels, they were "not suitable as propaganda on the issues of the day". The *Protocols* were too closely tied to the state of politics and the economy in early 20th-century Russia, too rambling and incoherent, and too far removed from Nazi ideology. Goebbels concluded: "One can't speak of a conspiracy of the Jewish race in any straightforward meaning of the term; this conspiracy is more a characteristic of the race than a case of intellectual intentions. The Jews will always act as their Jewish instinct tells them."

In the end, therefore, the impact of the *Protocols* would seem to have been seriously exaggerated by historians. Nor, contrary to what one might have expected, was another, somewhat more focused and coherent conspiracy theory – the stab-in-the-back myth championed by the ultra-right – particularly central to Nazi ideology.

According to the nationalist ultra-right in Germany, their country had been defeated in the First World War because of the subversive actions of socialists and revolutionaries. These groups had apparently undermined the German army's will to fight and destroyed their chances of victory by overthrowing Kaiser Wilhelm II in the German Revolution of November 1918. It was of no matter that the army was militarily defeated weeks before the revolution; or that it lacked the supplies and munitions needed to fight on; or that Germany had lost its key allies, Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary. For military leaders such as General Erich Ludendorff, it was an easy way of shifting the blame for the defeat away from themselves and on to the democrats and socialists they so bitterly hated – the people who had brought the democratic Weimar Republic into being.

In the most extreme version of this myth, the socialists had been working to defeat Germany because they were themselves part of the purported global Jewish conspiracy that the *Protocols* were supposed to have uncovered. But, contrary to what one might have expected, Hitler consistently failed to make significant use of this version of the stab-in-the-back legend – or indeed any other iteration.

ALAMY

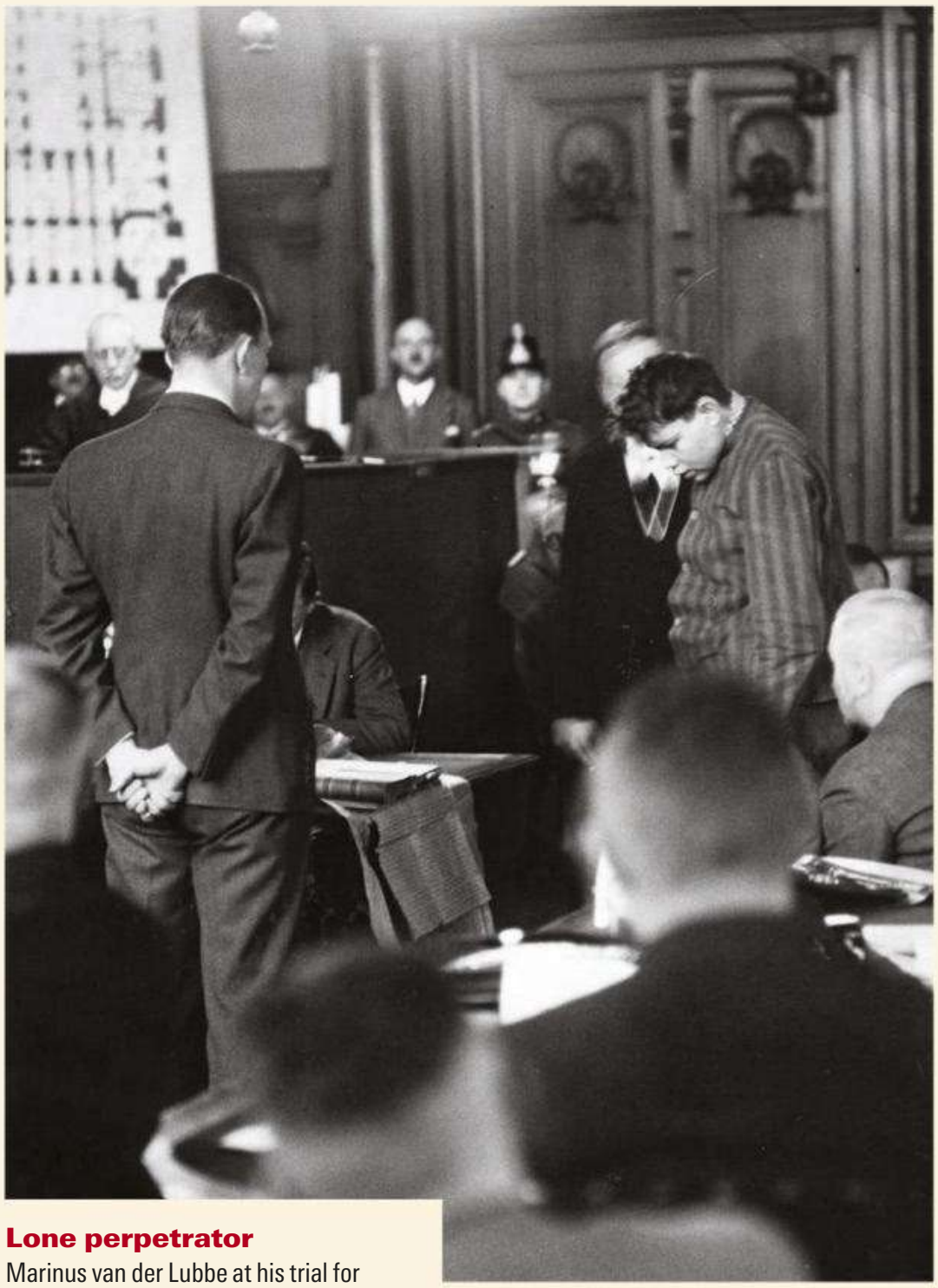
Shifting blame General Erich Ludendorff – shown right, with Kaiser Wilhelm II (centre) and Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg (left) – supported the stab-in-the-back myth, which shifted the blame of defeat away from him and other military leaders

There was no doubt, of course, about the visceral anti-Semitism of the Nazi party, and of Hitler himself, from the very beginning. But neither Hitler in his speeches, nor the Nazi press in its propaganda, made more than very occasional mentions of the supposed stab in the back. They preferred to concentrate their fire instead on the 'November criminals', the men who had (in their view) cravenly accepted the armistice terms and therefore betrayed the German race in the peace settlement. It was the weak will of the kaiser and his regime that had lost the war.

In their early propaganda and in the official Party Programme promulgated in 1920, the Nazis focused on what they portrayed as the economic criminality of Jewish "war profiteers". But even this propaganda line faded, as the Nazis came closer to power in the early 1930s. Rather than continuing to attack the old imperial elites for their supposed lack of willpower in 1918 – a line that would have alienated them at a time when he needed their support – Hitler preferred to instead pull them along with him in the drive towards war and conquest.

The stab-in-the-back myth represented a step along the road from a systemic to a more genuine type of conspiracy theory: the event conspiracy theory. Germany's

"*The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* have been accorded a demonic influence, but anyone who reads them will quickly realise how intellectually feeble they are



Lone perpetrator
Marinus van der Lubbe at his trial for starting a fire in the Reichstag building on the night of 27–28 February 1933. The Nazis claimed that it was a communist plot, but only the ultra-left anarcho-syndicalist van der Lubbe was convicted of treason by the court

R.A.F. ACE SCORES AGAIN—Page 2

Nazi Leader Flies To Scotland

Daily Record

RUDOLF HESS IN GLASGOW -OFFICIAL

HERR HESS, HITLER'S RIGHT-HAND MAN, HAS RUN AWAY FROM GERMANY AND IS IN GLASGOW SUFFERING FROM A BROKEN ANKLE. HE BROUGHT PHOTOGRAPHS TO ESTABLISH HIS IDENTITY.

AN OFFICIAL STATEMENT ISSUED FROM 10 DOWNING STREET AT 11.30 LAST NIGHT SAID—

THIS WAS HIS 'PLANE

Two pictures of the wreckage of Hess's Messerschmidt 110.

Benghazi Shelled

"I Found German Lying In Field"

Morning! Another Day Nearer Victory!

A desperate flight
Rudolf Hess's flight to Scotland – as described in the *Daily Record* – to deliver a "peace offer" to Churchill's government sparked many conspiracy theories. It was simply a harebrained bid to restore his power, Richard J Evans argues

Poisonous propaganda
Nazis at 'The Eternal Jew', an exhibition of anti-Semitism in Berlin, 1938. The conspiracy theory that Jews across the globe were determined to destroy Germany and the 'Aryan race' was fully embraced by Hitler and the Nazis

GETTY IMAGES/TOPFOTO

defeat in the First World War was more a bundle of events than a single occurrence. On the night of 27–28 February 1933, however, something happened that immediately became the object of two diametrically opposed conspiracy theories: the German national parliament building, the Reichstag, in Berlin, burned down.

Hitler had only been Reich chancellor for a few weeks, as head of a coalition government in which conservatives held the majority of posts. He saw this as the opportunity to seize quasi-dictatorial powers and, declaring that the arson attack marked the beginning of a communist coup, persuaded Reich President Paul von Hindenburg to promulgate a decree suspending civil liberties. Nazi stormtroopers subsequently rampaged across Germany suppressing opposition, often with extreme violence and brutality.

Communists across Europe had repeatedly tried to seize power by force, from Russia in 1917 to Hungary and southern Germany in 1918–19. During the time of the Weimar Republic they had been remarkably successful in winning votes, increasing their representation in the Reichstag in November 1932 to 100 seats. The Nazis, conversely, in the grip of a deep political and financial crisis, lost heavily in this, the last free election of the Weimar Republic, although they did remain the largest party.

It was not wholly implausible to suggest that the communists were launching a bid for dictatorial power in Germany in February 1933. But in reality, the Communist party of Germany, well-organised and supported though it was, expected the Weimar Republic to collapse of its own accord, as the capitalist system, in the middle of the Depression, proved unable to reproduce itself.

In the autumn of 1933, the Nazi leadership arrested several leading communists for the destruction of the Reichstag building and put them on trial along with one non-communist: a young Dutchman, Marinus van der Lubbe, who was caught at the scene. In a humiliating defeat for the Nazis, the Reich Supreme Court, which had not yet been fully Nazified, was forced to acquit them for lack of evidence: only van der Lubbe, against whom alone the evidence was overwhelming, was convicted and executed.

In the meantime, the communists developed a rival conspiracy theory, alleging that the fire had in fact been started by the Nazis themselves in order to provide an excuse for seizing dictatorial power. The communist propagandist Willi Münzenberg staged a counter-trial in London, at which, not surprisingly, the Nazis were found guilty of the crime. For decades, this view was widely shared, including among historians.

But in 1959 a German civil servant, Fritz Tobias, published research, which subsequently appeared as a formidably lengthy and deeply researched book, arguing that van der Lubbe had burned down the Reichstag on his own. The young Dutchman was an ultra-left anarcho-syndicalist who had already tried, and failed, to burn down other public buildings in Berlin in protest against what he regarded as the shameful treatment of the unemployed by the German government. But with the Reichstag building he got lucky: breaking in through a window just after nine in the evening of 27 February, he rushed through the corridors with a blazing torch and fire-lighting equipment. Curtains and wooden furniture caught fire, and updraft spread the flames into the dome above the debating chamber. Soon, the building was in ruins.

For more than 60 years, communists and their sympathisers have tried to shake the evidence presented by Tobias and discredit him as an old Nazi. In fact, he was a lifelong Social Democrat who blamed his own and his father's dismissals from their jobs on the measures introduced by the Nazis after the fire. Many of the communists' arguments are characteristic of conspiracy theories in general: key documents have disappeared or have been destroyed; key witnesses have been murdered; minor discrepancies in the actual evidence prove it was falsified; critics of the conspiracy theory are politically motivated or perpetuating 'official' lies. Above all, their central belief – that whoever benefits from an event must have caused it – is also one of the central beliefs in conspiracy theories of many kinds.

"It was obvious to most people in 1941, including Hitler, that Rudolf Hess had acted on his own. Soon enough, however, the conspiracy theories began to multiply

Similar allegations can be found in the burgeoning literature concerning another celebrated incident in the history of Nazi Germany: the unexpected flight of the Nazi party's deputy leader Rudolf Hess from Germany to Scotland in the middle of the war, on 10 May 1941, armed with a "peace offer" for Churchill's government. The offer was rejected – it would have amounted to a virtual capitulation in the long term – and Hess was arrested, tried at the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal after Germany's final defeat, and sentenced to life imprisonment. He died in Spandau prison in August 1987, at the age of 93.

It was obvious to most people in 1941 that Hess had acted on his own. He had lost power in the Nazi leadership and planned his harebrained flight in order to restore it. Hitler was horrified when he learned of Hess's actions, as were all the other leading Nazis. Soon enough, however, the conspiracy theories began to multiply, and in recent years they have been propagated with increasing frequency. Hess was sent by Hitler; he was invited over by a secret 'peace party' in Britain; he was lured over by the British security services; he was collaborating with Himmler, or Heydrich, in a bid to oust the Nazi dictator; even, most bizarrely of all, the man who landed in Scotland was not Hess at all, but a double – but why anybody would have agreed to spend decades in prison without revealing he was not the real Hess has never been explained. Yet again, there are allegations that evidence has been suppressed or destroyed, and key witnesses murdered. As with the

MORE FROM US

Richard J Evans discusses the Third Reich in our recent podcast **Everything you ever wanted to know about Nazi Germany** at *historyextra.com*

Cheating death
Hitler and Eva Braun pose with their dogs in 1942. Conspiracy theorists continue to assert that the Nazi leader and his wife escaped from the embers of the Third Reich in 1945

ALAMY

Reichstag fire conspiracy theories, documents have been presented that are clearly forgeries, designed to substitute for the real thing. None of this is at all persuasive.

The fantasies of the Hess conspiracy theorists seem almost conventional, however, in comparison to the most widespread event conspiracy theory about the Nazis today. Namely, the idea that Hitler, his wife, Eva Braun, and in some versions Blondi the dog, did not die in the Berlin bunker at the end of April 1945 but escaped to Argentina, where they lived peacefully in retirement after the war.

Newspaper and magazine articles, a growing number of books, and even a three-season television series (*Hunting Hitler*, broadcast on the History Channel) have presented this thesis – though without a shred of genuine evidence. Instead, all the 'evidence' presented is second-hand, hearsay, or, most commonly, supposition (Hitler 'could have' been here; he 'might have' been seen there). The fact is, of course, that Hitler was too ill in April 1945 to have undertaken a daring escape from Berlin, even had it been possible, and many eyewitnesses testified to his suicide in the bunker and the destruction of his corpse at the time.

Common to many such theories is a counterfactual suggestion amounting, in the minds of at least some of those who purvey them, to a degree of wishful thinking: *if only* the Jews had not been conspiring, then, according to conservative anti-Semites, the modern evils of liberalism, equality, free-thinking and secularisation would not be with us. *If only* the German army had not been stabbed in the back, according to German nationalists, it would have won the First World War. *If only* the Reichstag had not been burned down by the Nazis, according to the communists, then Weimar democracy would have survived, and the Holocaust would not have happened. *If only* Hess's peace mission had succeeded, according to British nationalists and nostalgic imperialists, then the Second World War would have been brought to an end, millions saved and the British empire preserved. *If only* the world had realised Hitler had escaped from the bunker, then, according to his admirers, we would know how great a genius he was – or alternatively, for his detractors, we would have been able to bring him to justice for his crimes. Conspiracists' claims about discovering unrecognised truths are often accompanied by assertions of having realised unconsidered possibilities.

"The fact is that Hitler was simply too ill in April 1945 to have undertaken a daring escape from Berlin, and many eyewitnesses have testified to his suicide in the bunker

Conspiracy theories present to their consumers a world of black and white: of individual heroes, usually outsiders, who strive against overwhelming odds to uncover the truth; and of collective villains, usually in positions of power, who do everything to conceal it. Against the moral ambiguities of real life, they paint a picture of moral absolutes, of good and evil – a picture that is both easier to understand and, because of this, more interesting and exciting to portray than the grey complexity of documented reality. The reader, television consumer or moviegoer can gain satisfaction from identifying with the intrepid hero as he or, less commonly she, penetrates the veil of secrecy drawn by officialdom to unmask the plotters and conspirators who are manipulating events to their own advantage.

The current proliferation, and, in some cases, revival of conspiracy theories involving Hitler is part of a much wider trend, in which different influences have come together to blur the boundaries between truth and fiction; or rather, perhaps, to present alternative 'truths', each of which claims to correspond to reality and presents its own panoply of evidential support to back up its claims.

But there cannot be different and opposing true statements about something; there can only be one truth, even if it can sometimes be very hard to ascertain. Discovering what really happened in history is difficult. It requires a great deal of hard work, it demands direct examination of the evidence, it presupposes a willingness to change one's mind, and it involves the suspension of one's prejudices and preconceptions. But it can be done. H

Richard J Evans is a historian whose latest book, *The Hitler Conspiracies: The Third Reich and the Paranoid Imagination*, will be published by Allen Lane in October 2020

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BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

BRITAIN'S BLACK

High achievers

Our collage of black pioneers – all voted one of the '100 Great Black Britons' – shows: Trevor Beresford Romeo (music producer Jazzie B), Baroness Rosalind Howells (politician), John Archer (politician), Oona King (politician), Floella Benjamin (entertainer), Zadie Smith (author), Lenny Henry (comedian), Phil Lynott (rock star), David Lammy (politician), Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (composer), Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz (queen-consort), Moira Stuart (broadcaster), Joan Armatrading (singer-songwriter), Linton Kwesi Johnson (dub poet), Harold Moody (doctor), Courtney Pine (musician), Ira Frederick Aldridge (actor), Shirley Bassey (singer), Baroness Valerie Amos (politician), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (poet), Olaudah Equiano (abolitionist), Dounne Alexander (entrepreneur), and Viv Anderson (footballer)

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TRAILBLAZERS

Black British history has been marginalised for far too long, argues **Angelina Osborne**, co-author of new book *100 Great Black Britons*. Below Angelina celebrates black people's contribution to the nation's past, and, over the page, profiles seven pioneers whose stories deserve a wider audience

If any moment captured longstanding attitudes to the contributions of black and Asian people to British history, then it perhaps arrived in 2002, when the BBC unveiled its quest to find the '100 Greatest Britons'. The campaign, which was based around a TV series, invited viewers to vote for the historical Briton they thought most deserving of the tag 'great'.

The 100 names put forward by the public were, in some ways, hugely varied – ranging from rock stars and royalty to occultists. Yet, in another respect, the choices were depressingly homogeneous: with the exception of Freddie Mercury (originally from Zanzibar and of Parsi heritage), each and every one was white.

It was a familiar story. '100 Greatest Britons' reinforced the narrative that celebrates British invention, exploration, political and cultural innovations, while making no mention of the contributions of black and Asian citizens. The exclusions said something important about how British history was being taught and told: that black and Asian people had no part to play in it.

The lack of a black and Asian presence in the 100 Greatest Britons poll provoked a great deal of frustration. But it also elicited a response – and that came in 2003 in the form of the 100 Great Black Britons campaign. This public poll focused on 100 black people whose lives showed that British history is, at its essence, multicultural. The results were announced live on Channel 4 News in 2004, with nurse and war hero Mary Seacole (pictured above) voted as the Greatest Black Briton.

Earlier this year, the campaign was relaunched, accompanied by a book, *100 Great Black Britons* (of which I am a co-author). This relaunch is part of the ongoing efforts to transform how we interpret and produce history – made even more pressing in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Momentous events

The 100 Great Black Britons campaign does what historians and activists have been doing for many years: highlighting stories of the African and Caribbean presence in Britain. It sheds new light on key events and celebrates individuals who played important roles in some of the most momentous periods in British history.

BRIEDGEMAN

There is evidence of an African presence in Britain since the second century AD. Forensic analysis of the Beachy Head Lady, discovered in East Sussex in 1953, concluded that she was a woman of sub-Saharan African ancestry, who had lived in that region around AD 200–250. Further archaeological discoveries around the UK have shown that Africans were present in various levels of Roman society: African soldiers marched and fought in the Roman army that occupied Britain, and parts of the country were governed by Roman Africans, including Quintus Lollicus Urbicus (hailing from present-day Algeria), who supervised the building of the Antonine Wall in what is now Scotland.

And an African presence continued to be felt in Britain. In the 16th century – before black populations were established as a consequence of Atlantic slavery – people of colour from Africa, Europe and the Spanish Caribbean lived and worked in Britain. There were black servants for royalty, as well as black sailors, royal pages, needle makers and soldiers.

Britain's dominance in the transatlantic slave trade meant that the African population in Britain increased exponentially. They came to Britain to work as servants, craftsmen or entertainers, being brought by merchants, sailors and plantation owners from Africa and the Americas. Many of the arriving Africans, believing that slavery was outlawed in Britain, escaped their bondage and established communities here.

Some, such as Mary Prince (see page 69), penned influential works to help abolish the system of slavery in Britain's colonies, leaving behind evidence of shrewd political campaigning and testimony of their own enslavement. One cannot discuss the abolition of the slave trade without including the roles black people played. Similarly, the radical working-class reform movement of the 19th century takes on an anti-colonialist dimension when the activism of black people, including William Cuffay (see page 69), is recognised.

Black people have made an immense contribution to this country's history. Over the page, I have profiled seven examples. All were trailblazers; all lived lives of particular merit, be it for their political activism or pioneering careers. Yet most have been omitted from mainstream historical narratives. It's high time that changed.

The north African-born emperor Septimius Severus arrived in Britannia in AD 208

WARRIOR-EMPEROR

Lucius Septimius Severus

c145–211 AD

Africans were among the people who helped establish the might of Roman civilisation in its many territories – including Britannia. Lucius Septimius Severus, born in Leptis Magna in Tripolitania (present-day Libya), was of African descent, but the part he played in extending the empire was far greater than that of his peers. He was chosen as emperor by his troops at the legionary fortress in Carnuntum (present-day Austria) in AD 193, and went on to make his mark in Britain.

Severus was descended, via his father, from the Phoenicians who had settled in Africa from the ninth century BC and eventually integrated into the indigenous African population. Coming from a wealthy family of the political class known as *equestrians*, Severus arrived in Rome aged 18 and moved through a series of high-ranking appointments under Emperor Marcus Aurelius. When Marcus Aurelius's son, Commodus, became emperor in AD 180, Severus's star did not diminish: he became consul in AD 190.

However, Commodus's assassination in AD 192 ushered in a period of instability; within a year, five emperors had claimed imperial power. This uncertain political climate fanned Severus's political ambitions, and, supported by formidable legions, he marched into Carnuntum from Pannonia (modern-day Hungary) and claimed imperial power for himself in AD 193. But it took four years of political manoeuvring, power plays and ferocious battles for his ambitions to be finally realised. In AD 197, he was confirmed as emperor of Rome after the battle of Lugdunum (now Lyon) – the largest engagement ever fought by Roman forces.

When Severus and his troops arrived in Britannia in AD 208, he was welcomed and hailed as the deliverer from the Gauls and the Germans who continually ravaged and pillaged the island. The emperor was concerned with upholding this image and protecting his lands from foreign invaders: he supervised the refurbishment, repair and upgrading of Hadrian's Wall.

Throughout his reign, Severus understood that having a strong military could make or break a ruler – indeed, without his faithful legionaries, he likely would not have become emperor at all. He told his sons on his deathbed: "Be good to one another, enrich the soldiers, and damn the rest."

BRIDGEMAN/ COLLEGE OF ARMS MS WESTMINSTER TOURNAMENT ROLL. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE KINGS, HERALDS AND PURSUIVANTS OF ARMS

TUDOR TRUMPETER

John Blanke

Late 15th–16th century

John Blanke is one of the most widely recognised Africans of Tudor England. It's thought he arrived in England with Catherine of Aragon, when she came to marry Henry VII's eldest son, Arthur, in 1501. Historically, his presence has been explained as part of the trend for European royalty to employ Africans as musicians, entertainers and servants. However, in reality, a number of Africans were living in England at the time and working in a range of occupations – both in the royal courts and beyond – living unremarkable lives.

But Blanke's life certainly cannot be described as unremarkable: he was a witness to several of the most important royal events in the Tudor period. Clad all in black, he was one of eight royal trumpeters whose doleful music sounded at the funeral of Henry VII in May 1509. A month later, he was dressed in a brilliant scarlet tunic when he played at the coronation of Henry VIII. And two years after that, in 1511, he was invited to help celebrate another milestone in the Tudor dynasty: he played at the special tournament in Westminster to celebrate the birth of Henry and Catherine of Aragon's short-lived son.

Blanke's likeness was even depicted on the 1511 Westminster Tournament Roll (right), a piece of artwork that Henry commissioned to celebrate the event. Scholars spotted the figure that appears to be Blanke in the 1950s, and in the 1980s the roll was featured in an exhibition entitled Roots in Britain: Black and Asian Citizens from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II, which historians Audrey Dewjee and Ziggy Alexander developed for Brent Council.

From entries in the royal records, it is clear that Blanke held a prominent position within the royal household. He had attained this by petitioning Henry VIII for the position of a deceased trumpeter and boldly asking the king to double his wages from 8 to 16d per day. He complained his current wage was "not sufficient to mayntaigne to doo your grace lyke service as other your trompeters doo" and asked that his "true and faithfull service" be considered. His cheek paid off: he was the first African known to have successfully petitioned for a pay rise in Britain.

John Blanke shown on the 1511 Westminster Tournament Roll. The trumpeter witnessed some of the key events of the Tudor era

FREEDOM FIGHTER

Mary Prince
c1788–c1830s

Mary Prince's narrative *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (1831) was a fierce anti-slavery message which provided a compelling rebuke to the slavery apologists. It made her the first black British woman to call for immediate emancipation. The book was a cause celebre, one that arguably advanced the passing of the Slavery Emancipation Act in 1833.

The Bermudan-born Prince's story is made even more remarkable by the fact that, at the time, enslaved men and women had practically no opportunity to share – let alone publish – their experiences. Consequently, when Prince wrote her *History*, she was voicing not only her own experiences of slavery, but those of the entire enslaved population in the Caribbean. She often spoke out bravely against the horrific treatment she endured, which included severe beatings and floggings "from the whip, the rope, and the cowskin".

Most enslaved workers had one or two owners in their lifetime; Prince, however, had five. This suggests that she had a strong will, which meant although she still experienced terrible violence at the hands of her owners, she had the courage to challenge their behaviour. "I have often wondered," she wrote in her *History*, "how English people can go out into the West Indies and act in such a beastly manner. But when they go to the West Indies, they forget God and all feelings of shame, I think, since they can do such things."

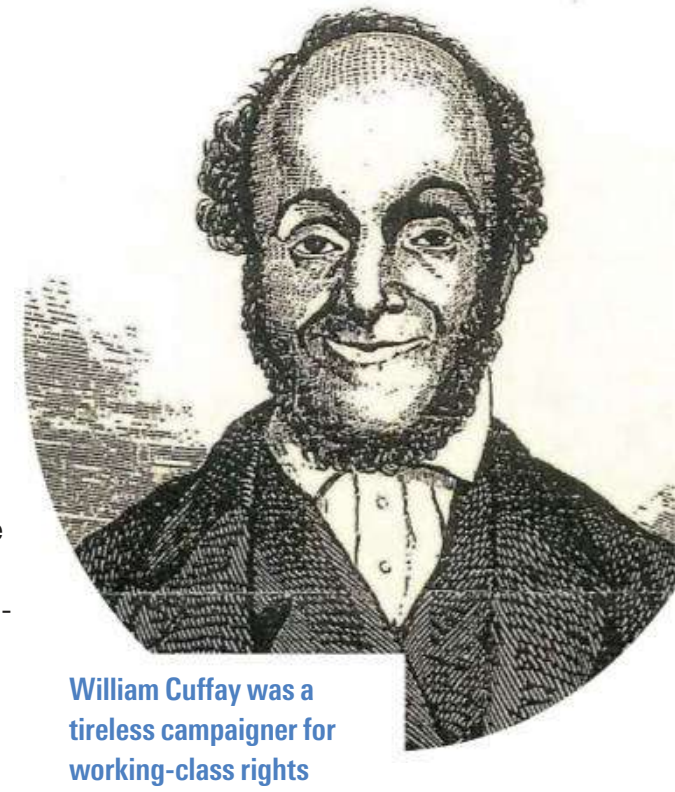
Mary Prince travelled to England with her last owners, the Woods, in 1828, where she was exposed to the debates on slave emancipation taking place in parliament and the agitation this caused across the country. In London, the Woods' continued monstrous treatment of Prince led her to leave them. She sought refuge in a Moravian missionary church in Hatton Garden and later with the Anti-Slavery Society, who, upon hearing her story, published it.

In the face of terrible odds, Prince refused to submit and constantly fought against extreme physical and psychological trauma and hardships. She provides an insight into how enslavement affected human beings, both the enslavers and the enslaved, and how the enslaved used their environment to have some control over their futures. Her *History* highlights not only the indignities and suffering of that terrible institution, but also ways in which the human spirit could triumph.

PUBLIC DOMAN

CHAMPION OF THE DOWNTRODDEN

William Cuffay
1788–1870



William Cuffay was a tireless campaigner for working-class rights

Within the various movements for political reform and workers' rights in the early to mid-19th century, William Cuffay was one of the causes' most militant and prominent contributors. Originally a tailor by trade, Cuffay swapped sewing for activism when he became a leader of the London Chartists.

His father was born enslaved in St Kitts, an island in the West Indies, and later worked as a cook on board a warship. Raised by his mother in Chatham, Cuffay was born with deformities in his spine and legs. But although he was branded an outsider by virtue of his disability and ethnicity, neither hindered his determination to succeed.

Cuffay's political awakening occurred when he took part in the tailors' strike in 1834, which cost him his job and his shop. Not long after that, he joined the Chartist movement – which campaigned for political reform and working-class male suffrage – and quickly became prominent within the London leadership. Proud of his working-class roots and his trade, he intensely disliked the middle classes, the aristocracy and industrialists.

In 1842 Cuffay chaired a "Great Public Meeting of Tailors", and, following the arrest of the Chartist movement's national leaders, he was appointed president of a five-man interim executive.

The press frequently attacked him for his militancy, often working race into their commentary. He was racially lampooned in *Punch* and *The Illustrated London News*. *The Times* referred to the London Chartists as "the black man and his party".

Cuffay nevertheless rose to become one of the most dynamic representatives of the English working class. Appointed to the Master and Servants Bill Demonstration Committee, he vigorously opposed the power given to magistrates to imprison workers for two months purely on their employers' word. He was a supporter of the Chartist Land Plan, which proposed to take the unemployed out of the slums and to allocate families two acres of land each. He cared deeply for the plight of the working classes and was committed to improving their lives and the conditions they lived in. Cuffay had a reputation for advocating direct action, having little time for "useless and unnecessary speeches", and was committed to "[securing for] the people their just and inalienable rights".

To the ruling classes, Cuffay was a dangerous man, and police spies kept a close watch on his activities. In 1848, after one of the last significant Chartist demonstrations, in Kennington Common, he was arrested and convicted of conspiring to levy war against the queen, based on the unreliable evidence of police informants. In his final speech to the jury at his trial in September 1848, he remarked: "I do not want any pity. No, I pity the government and I pity the Attorney General, [who] ought to be called the Spy General… I am not anxious for martyrdom, but after what I have endured this week I feel I could endure any punishment proudly."

Condemned to transportation to Tasmania in 1849, Cuffay continued his political activism there until his death in 1870.

FATHER OF AFRICAN EMANCIPATION

George Padmore
1903–59

The interwar period saw the emergence of activism out of Africa and the Caribbean that contained new forms of anti-colonialism and Pan-Africanism, advocating the political union of all the indigenous inhabitants of Africa. George Padmore (born Malcolm Ivan Meredith Nurse, and pictured above) was one of the key figures of these movements. He was part of a new wave of activists and intellectuals living in Britain who were deeply committed to critiquing and eventually breaking the power of colonial authority.

Born into a radical-thinking family in Trinidad, Nurse was exposed to racial politics as a student in the US, where he joined the Communist party and changed his name to George Padmore. After moving to Hamburg, he became editor of the *Negro Worker*, a communist trade-union newspaper written for working-class black people around the world, writing about the conditions of black people in Africa, the Caribbean, the US and Europe. He also helped organise the first international conference of black workers in Moscow, which inspired his book *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* (1931). In this work, Padmore discussed how millions of black workers were being exploited throughout the US, the Caribbean and Africa, which he described as "one of the most degrading spectacles of bourgeois civilisation".

In the 1930s Padmore became disenchanted with communism and grew more interested in Pan-Africanist activism. Angered at Italy's intention to invade Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia), he joined the International African Friends of Abyssinia, established by his friend the writer CLR James in London. James introduced Padmore to activists including Amy Ashwood Garvey, co-founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and Jomo Kenyatta, the future president of Kenya. The group played a major role in the struggle for decolonisation and Pan-Africanism, and in 1937 they founded the International African Service Bureau, to address the oppression of black people globally.

After the Second World War drew to a close, Padmore's role in Pan-Africanism continued to grow. He was part of the organising committee for the 5th Pan African Conference, for instance, which convened in October 1945. More than 200 delegates, representing trade unions, farmers, political organisations, students and black organisations in Britain, attended. Empowered by the event and eager to shape the future, many of the delegates became leading political activists against colonial rule in their countries.

As well as indirectly influencing hundreds of activists through the conference, Padmore also held sway over key individuals who were working to wrestle control away from colonial powers. He advised Kwame Nkrumah, revolutionary and future president of Ghana, before and after Ghanaian independence. For this and his other extraordinary efforts, today Padmore is remembered as "one of the fathers of African emancipation".

COMMUNITY HEALER

Claudia Jones
1915–64

In the 1950s and 60s, Claudia Jones committed herself to campaigning on behalf of the Caribbean community in Britain. As a journalist she created a political voice for Caribbeans through the *West Indian Gazette*, Britain's first newspaper aimed at black people, and helped create the London Carnival, precursor of the Notting Hill Carnival, to use cultural expression and celebration to tackle racism.

Jones, born Claudia Vera Cumberbatch in Port of Spain, Trinidad, joined her parents in Harlem, New York (where they'd moved in search of work) when she was nine. As a young woman, she yearned to help liberate black people and believed that socialism held the answer. Accordingly, she joined the Young Communist League, eager to do her part for the cause.

By 1937, at the age of 22, Jones was on the editorial staff of the *Daily Worker* (a newspaper published in New York by the US Communist party). Over the next 10 years, her understanding and interpretation of Marxist theory and her skills as a speaker, writer and organiser saw her rise quickly though the party ranks, becoming national director of the Young Communist League in 1941.

Claudia Jones at the Brixton offices of *The West Indian Gazette* – Britain's first newspaper aimed at black people – in 1962

After many years battling immigration charges as a consequence of her activism, in 1955 Jones lost the right to remain in the US and was deported to Britain. When she arrived in London, she became painfully aware that the experiences of black people in Britain were often uncomfortable and oppressive – drawing disturbing parallels with the country she had been forced to leave behind. In particular, Jones noticed the alienation and discrimination that Caribbean immigrants were facing. She saw London as another site of struggle, and almost immediately began organising the London Caribbean community.

One of the major tools of mobilisation was the *West Indian Gazette*, which was founded in 1957 and launched in March 1958. This newspaper reported on the gains of various independence movements in the Caribbean, Pan-Africanism and anti-colonial struggles.

GETTY IMAGES

After being arrested and beaten by police in 1969, Olive Morris dedicated her life to combating the dual oppressions of being black and female

LAMBETH ARCHIVES

The ‘race’ riots in London and Nottingham in 1958 helped conceive the idea of a carnival as a way to heal the community through its common African ancestry. The first carnival was held in St Pancras Town Hall in January 1959, and four subsequent carnivals had a significant impact in making Caribbean culture central to the British experience.

Jones felt that Caribbean traditions had much to offer the world in terms of creating a culture of human happiness that would dwarf the ignorance and pain of racism. Through the medium of carnival, the different black British communities could educate one another and develop self-awareness about their cultural histories. “There is a comfort in this effort,” wrote Jones, “for all West Indians, who strain to hear and feel and reflect their idiom… to transplant our folk origins to British soil.”

Jones’s death from a heart attack at the age of 49 ripped a hole in the fabric of British-Caribbean society. In the nine years she had lived in England, her finger was firmly on the pulse of British society, and she had used her remarkable gifts to create unity and strength within black British communities.

FEMINIST TRAILBLAZER

Olive Morris
1952–79

By the late sixties, black communities in Britain were under siege, finding themselves the victims of popular and institutional racism. Discrimination in housing, employment and policing was having a destructive impact on their lives.

Racism was becoming more forceful and permissible. Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech in 1968, an incendiary attack on Commonwealth migration, influenced white supremacist groups such as the National Front to incite violence against these communities. Black children were being classed as “educationally subnormal”, and unemployment was rife among African-Caribbean youth. Consequently, black organisations promoting collective action against these injustices began to emerge, advocating self-defence and self-reliance.

It was within this period that Olive Morris came of age politically. Aged 17, while hanging out with friends outside of Desmond’s Hip City, one of the first black-owned record shops in Brixton, she was caught up in an incident of police brutality.

Clement Gomwalk, a Nigerian diplomat, was arrested and beaten by two policemen after they pulled him over in his Mercedes and accused him of stealing it. In the words of the journalist Aymo Martin Tajo, Morris “broke through the crowd to the scuffle… and tried physically to stop the police beating Gomwalk”. The police, believing her to be a man (she was wearing men’s clothing and had short hair) turned on her, viciously kicking her and raining down blows until she fell to the ground. Morris recalled that, while in police custody, “they made me take off my jumper and my bra in front of them to show I was a girl”. Her brother, Basil, described her injuries after the incident, saying he “could hardly recognise her face, they beat her so badly”.

She was charged with assaulting a police officer and engaging in threatening behaviour, and received a suspended sentence.

Morris began to contest injustice, joining the British Black Panther Party Youth League and learning to arm herself physically and intellectually against police violence and racism. She understood the need to address the dual oppressions of being black and female, co-founding the Brixton Black Women’s Group and the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent. Both of these organisations provided advice and guidance for women about issues that affected their lives, such as housing, education, employment and welfare. They also brought together black and Asian women from different backgrounds and political perspectives across Britain, encouraging them to set up their own study and self-help groups.

When, in 1975, Morris enrolled at Manchester University to study social sciences, she juggled the pressures of being a student with her personal call to activism. She got involved with community groups in Moss Side and was an active member of the Manchester Black Women’s Co-operative, before continuing her campaigning work back in Brixton.

Morris died of cancer in July 1979, aged just 27. She left behind an extraordinary legacy of community activism, committed to the struggle against race, sex and class oppression. H

Angelina Osborne is a researcher and heritage consultant. She is co-author (with Patrick Vernon) of *100 Great Black Britons*, which was published by Robinson in September

WATCH David Olusoga’s series **Black and British** is available on BBC iPlayer *bbc.co.uk/programmes/b082x0h6*

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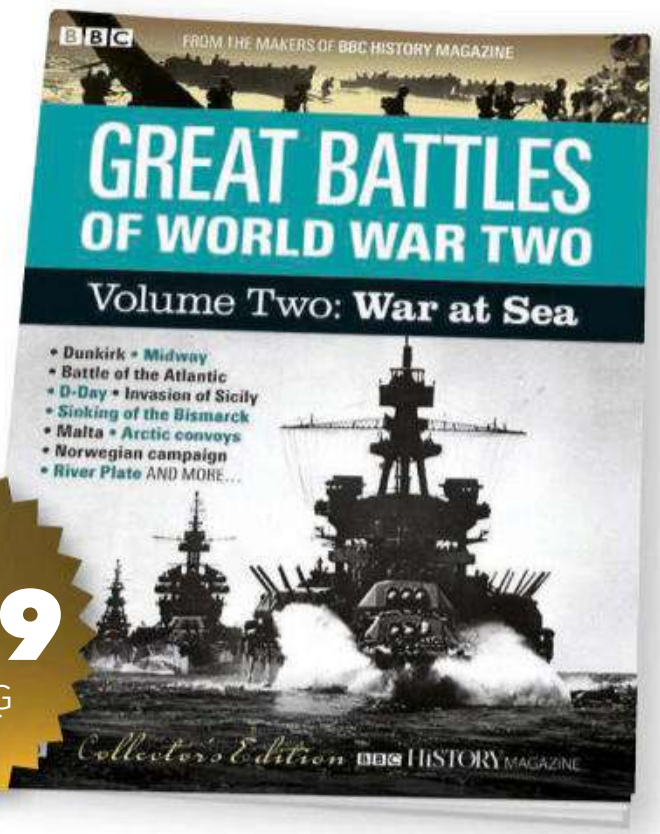
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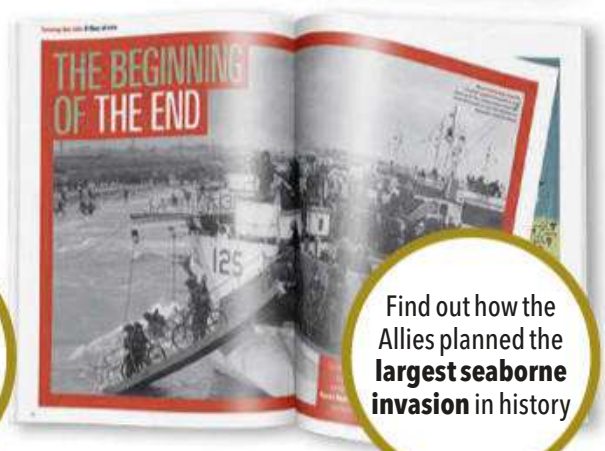

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BOOKS

MEDIEVAL

"For anyone interested in the tumultuous beginnings of the house of Plantagenet, this book is a must"

Nicola Tallis nominates her classic book › page 81

SECOND WORLD WAR

"Allport punctures the notion that Britain was a peaceful place before the war"

Daniel Todman reviews Alan Allport's *Britain at Bay: The Epic Story of the Second World War* › page 78

EGYPTOLOGY

"The debate over the decolonisation of Egyptology has only just started"

Joyce Tyldesley on Toby Wilkinson's *A World Beneath the Sands* › page 81

INTERVIEW

"Deep down, we are fundamentally still the same as we were 100,000 years ago"

Neil Oliver talks about his new book, *Wisdom of the Ancients* › page 74

GLOBAL

"The book seeks to resuscitate the reputation of once admired but recently maligned men"

Camilla Townsend considers Fernando Cervantes' *Conquistadors* › page 83

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INTERVIEW / NEIL OLIVER

"We've made our modern lives so stressful. But there's a therapy for that – paying attention to the past"

NEIL OLIVER talks to Ellie Cawthorne about his new book, which searches the ancient past for timeless wisdom to help relieve our modern malaise

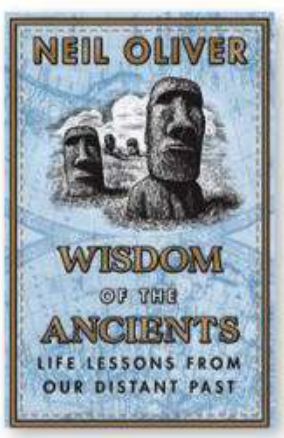
Ellie Cawthorne: In the introduction to the book, you speak about being in search of reassurance and a source of optimism. Why do you think our ancient ancestors are the place to turn for that reassurance?

Neil Oliver: In my work, I read across thousands of years' worth of history. I think if you do that, you quite quickly come to the realisation that what's happening now has happened before in cycles. There's a slowly tumbling wheel of time and the human race has been through the same sorts of problems again and again. They've had wars. They've seen outbreaks of pestilence and plague. They've had tyrannies and had democracies.

If you don't pay attention to history, you might think that what's happening to us in the 21st century is uniquely bad. But I feel that if you look back at other times and see how people coped with difficult situations, it's reassuring to know that nothing is new. Our species has been dealing with the same big challenges again and again.

You quote the biologist Edward Osborne Wilson in saying that one issue we face in the modern world is having "god-like technology" but "palaeolithic emotions". Why did that idea resonate with you?

As a species, we are maybe 200,000 years old. That number is fairly hard to pin down as the science keeps on changing. But the humans alive 100,000 years ago had exactly the same cognitive abilities as us – the same brain, same emotions. The same aspirations, ambitions, anxieties, the same cares for family, or predilections towards depression and stress, and all the rest of it. We're exactly the same animals as we were in those unimaginably different circumstances. But today, we're expecting people who are essentially the same animals as those living a hunter-gatherer existence 100,000 years ago to cope with the reality that we have now, where the advent of modern technology means that we're increasingly existing to serve the machines, rather than the machines existing to serve us.



Wisdom of the Ancients: Life Lessons from our Distant Past
by Neil Oliver
(Bantam, 304 pages, £20)

And it's self-evident that people are struggling with it. We have conquered so many diseases and lifted billions of people out of poverty. In western Europe, we've lived, by comparison, in a very tolerant and peaceful society. And yet, even given all of those incredible gifts, so many people, it seems to me, are finding it hard to cope with daily reality. And I think it's because we're not giving ourselves the chance to take a breath and accept that deep down we fundamentally still are what we were 100,000 years ago. We've asked an awful lot of ourselves – to cope with social media and mobile phones, jet planes and emails and all the rest. But I think there's a panacea for that – there's almost a therapy you can put yourself through by paying attention to the past.

What kinds of life lessons can we take from the past?

I think it's simple things. In the book I look at a circular setting of rocks at Olduvai [in modern-day Tanzania] dated to 1.9 million years ago, which has been interpreted as the basis for 'the oldest house in the world'. I suggest it speaks to the idea of people, even then, thinking about a permanent base. Maybe women with suckling youngsters, unable to follow the hunt, waited at such places. Hunters perhaps resisted the urge to eat at the site of the kill, remembering others awaiting them, and took food back to share.

This is potentially very early evidence of the importance of having place for family, a home. That's a fundamental realisation that our species came to not thousands of years ago, or even hundreds of thousands of years ago, but millions. When we live confusing, complicated lives among the maelstrom of everything else that's going on, it's a great source of comfort to be reminded that the importance of family is and always has been central to a person's sanity.

Another lesson worth learning is just how brief our appearance on this Earth is. We walk our dog on a golf course close to where we live in Stirling. And along our route, there's a piece of exposed bedrock – a clump of volcanic rock no bigger than a dustbin lid. This little bit of bedrock is perhaps 300 million years old, and etched into it are cup and ring marks made by Neolithic farmers maybe 4,000 or 5,000 years ago. We know that farmers all over Europe were in the habit of making these marks.

I take comfort from knowing that those marks have been there through all the history that we care about. Throughout the rise and fall of empires, world wars, and the comings and goings of kingdoms – in all of that time, those three or four little circles have been etched into that rock.

You'll have a similar experience if you visit somewhere like Callanish stone circle in Scotland. The stone there is Lewisian gneiss – some of the oldest rock on Earth. It was created something like 3 billion years ago, and the planet's only four and a half billion years old. So without a shadow of a doubt, if you touch the Callanish stones, you will never in your life touch anything older. I appreciate being reminded that I am an infinitesimal speck in the continuum of time. It helps me to put my everyday cares and concerns into context.

ROBERTO RICCIUTI–GETTY IMAGES

PROFILE

Neil Oliver is an archaeologist, author and broadcaster. He is known as the presenter of the BBC series *Coast* and *A History of Scotland*. Neil's previous books include *The Story of the British Isles in 100 Places* (Bantam, 2018), *Vikings: A History* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012) and *A History of Ancient Britain* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2011)

You take a very personal approach to archaeological discoveries in the book, and one of the things you try to do is get to the human stories underneath the material findings. How can you reconstruct emotion from archaeological evidence?
One of the discoveries that I look at in the book is the grave of a mother and baby found in Vedbæk, just north of Copenhagen. It's almost certain that the mother and baby both died during childbirth and were buried together 6 or 7,000 years ago. What's really remarkable is that when the baby was placed in the grave, it was laid on top of a swan's wing. There was no practical necessity to do that. Instead, it could perhaps be evidence of someone imagining that by involving the spirit of a swan, they could harness the activity of migratory birds – that the soul of the baby might come back in the same way that the swans would come back every year. Or at the very least, somebody just couldn't bear the thought of putting an infant's body onto the cold ground without something soft and comforting to place it on.

Neolithic cup and ring markings at Baluachraig. "I take comfort from knowing that those marks have been there through all the history that we care about," Neil Oliver says of similar carvings near his home in Stirling

In discoveries like this, buried alongside the bones and other bits and pieces, you can find emotion. You can find grief, archaeologically. It is profoundly affecting that after thousands of years of it lying forgotten in the ground, archaeologists could open that grave in the 1980s and find an ephemeral human emotion there on the ground, made evident by the way in which the mourning people treated those bodies.

Other burial sites you discuss include those at Shanidar in modern-day Iraq. Why did those discoveries capture your imagination?
Once upon a time, maybe as recently as 30,000 years ago, there was more than one kind of humankind on the planet. That in itself is an amazing thought. Of course, Homo sapiens are now the only ones left, but around 100,000 years ago there's a possibility that we might have shared the planet with as many as a dozen variations on what it is to be human. Just imagine that!

One of those varieties of humans were the Neanderthals, who emerged around half a million years ago, and went extinct perhaps around 40,000 years ago. In our conceit as Homo sapiens, we imagined for the longest time that we were the only humans who did things like bury our dead. It turns out that this was a terrible vanity, because the Neanderthals were doing it too. What you find in the caves at Shanidar is evidence of Neanderthal burial.

One of the most extraordinary discoveries at Shanidar is the body of an individual called Nandy, as he was nicknamed by archaeologists. Nandy had a disabled arm and was also blind in one eye. This inevitably meant that he would have been a bit of a burden on the rest of the tribe, in that he couldn't hunt but he still required food.

You might think that a savage, brutal version of humankind would have done away with him as an encumbrance that they couldn't be bothered with. But the evidence is that Nandy lived to be old by the standards of the day, possibly into his 40s. We can tell this because he had arthritis, and his teeth were worn down from his diet. When Nandy died, his fellow Neanderthals buried him in a cave. We don't live inside those people's minds, so we can't know exactly what they were doing. But looking at it objectively, it appears that he was looked after and valued. And when he died, he was treated with great respect.

Another burial in the same cave appears to be of a man whose grave was filled with fresh cut flowers, which seems to be a great expression of sophisticated thinking. It is also a reminder that love itself isn't only ours – these discoveries suggest that it transcends the species, because we seem to also find it among the Neanderthals.

When we discuss the ancient past, the common assumption is that people's lives back then were purely a gruelling slog for survival. Why did you want to offer a different perspective?
It's true that for most people, for most of history, life was hard. Daily realities included pain without pain relief, disease without treatment, infant mortality, the presence of terrifying predators, and no means of contraception or controlling childbirth. The brutal, cruel, harsh fact of life as the majority of people lived it must not be overlooked. But what's instructive is that, even in those circumstances, people still found space for love and joy, for expressions of grief, for treating the dead with great respect, for extending all kinds of energy and imagination creating things like standing stones.

What's ironic at the moment is that more people are having a better chance of a life than ever. So with all that we've got, we have to ask ourselves: why can't we be happier?

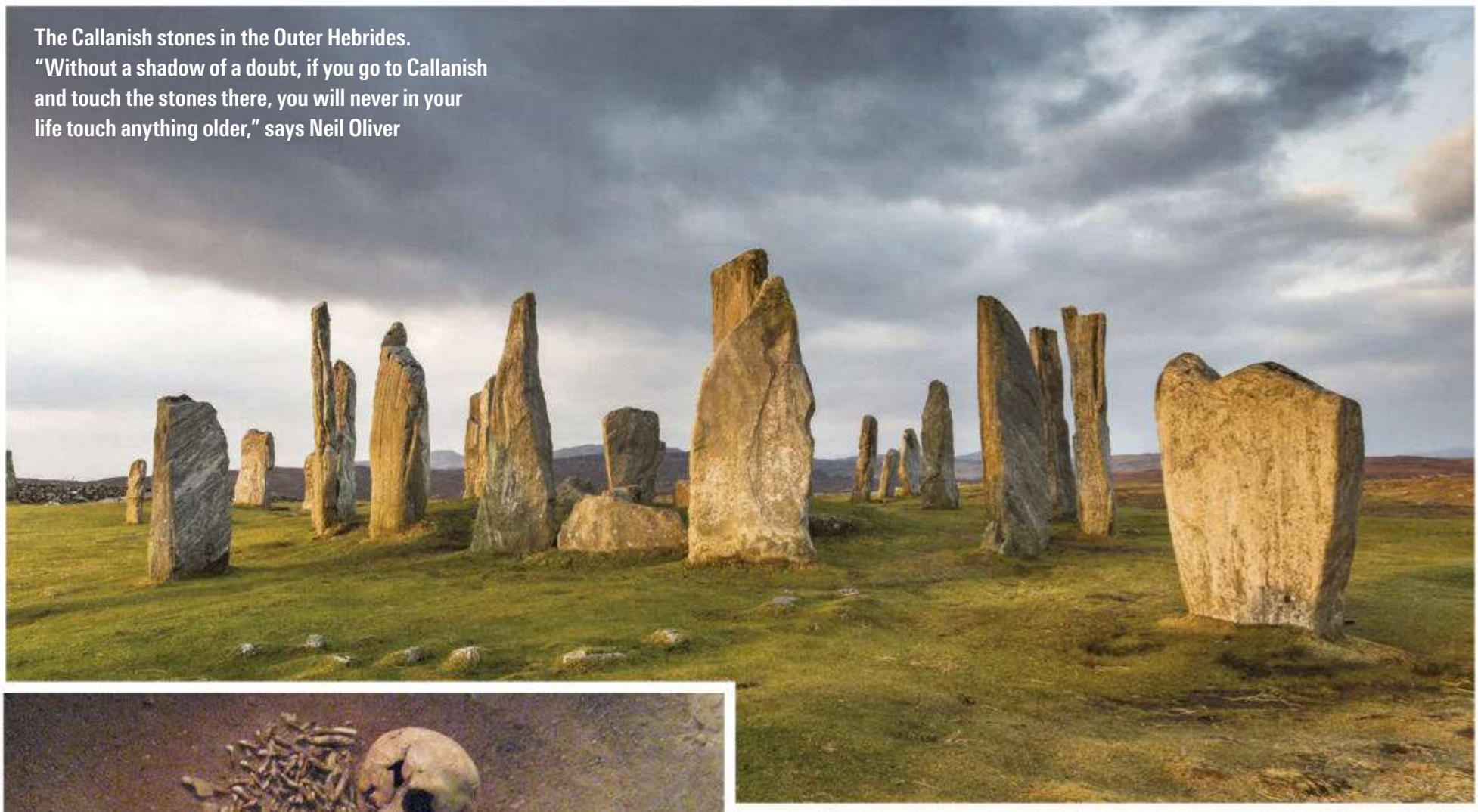
It's about drawing a breath and appreciating the world around us: being amazed by what is out there. Take the ancient Egyptians. Their civilisation lasted for more than 3,000 years. But in the end, it became a backwater because the Egyptians had gone down a path where they were setting life aside to focus instead on preparing for death. They suffered from a sort of terminal sterility. For all the wonders that had been achieved, Egypt was left behind like a rock pool.

One of the life lessons you write about in the book is the importance of home, and the place that you live in is clearly very important to you. Why do you think it's such a special area?
Stirling is an area richly steeped in stories. There's evidence of human population in the area running back for thousands of years, and a great deal of Scottish history has happened here. For the longest time, there was only a 9-mile-wide strip of dry land with solid, hard footing that you could move large bodies of men and animals through. On either side, out towards the coast, it was morass and marsh. So anyone with an army moving north, maybe to conquer Scotland, or travelling south, perhaps to invade England, had to come this way. That's why so many battles were fought in this particular vicinity.

If the trees weren't so full in leaf, I would be able to see Stirling Castle from my window. There's been a castle there for almost 1,000 years, which sits on a rock that's 300 million years old. Stirling Castle

"In some discoveries, buried alongside the bones and other bits and pieces, you can find emotion. You can find grief, archaeologically. I find that profoundly affecting"

ALAMY



The Callanish stones in the Outer Hebrides. "Without a shadow of a doubt, if you go to Callanish and touch the stones there, you will never in your life touch anything older," says Neil Oliver

The 6,000-year-old remains of a mother and baby uncovered in Vedbæk, in modern-day Denmark. In what Neil Oliver calls a "remarkable" discovery, archaeologists found that the baby had been laid on top of a swan's wing

ANNE BIRGITTE GURLEV, VEDBAEK FINDS MUSEUM, RUDERSDAL MUSEUMS, DENMARK

is known affectionately as the 'brooch' that hitches the Highlands to the Lowlands – it's a nexus of Scottish and therefore British history.

You could spend lifetimes trying to understand what's here, which means that just going out into the area around my house is enough. Now that we have the technology to look at anywhere in the world from our laptops, sometimes there's a tendency to overlook what's right here at home. It's like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* – it's only when she comes back to Kansas after all her adventures that she properly appreciates what she had.

If you had to nominate an ancient discovery or site as one of the most revealing about human history, which would you choose?
One that always grabs me is Birka Girl, a little Viking whose remains were found on the island of Björkö in modern-day Sweden. I think about her often. I know exactly where she was found – I've been to the island of Björkö, and seen her skeleton and grave. She was a little girl who probably died when she was no more than six years old. Archaeologists think that possibly her mother drank too much alcohol while pregnant and the little girl was born with a syndrome that would have made her look a bit different. But she was clearly valued, because when she died, she was richly adorned and buried in the best plot in the graveyard. She was certainly treasured for the short time that she was alive.

I think the reason I often think of her is because of all of the grief, emotion and humanity that was expressed in the way her little body was treated in death. Archaeological analysis revealed that the dress that she was wearing in her grave was red. Sometimes I'll see a flash of red out of the corner of my eye and I'll think about Birka Girl.

I've made documentaries and written a book about Vikings. We think about them as being these great warriors with longboats and battleaxes – a source of terror. But for me, when someone says the word 'Viking', I think about a little girl in a red dress.

What lesson have you been most inspired by? Lately you've been involved in debates about freedom of speech. Is there any ancient wisdom that would apply to that?
Legend has it that King Solomon wore a ring with the words "This too shall pass" etched into it. It was supposed to remind him that, however great a king he might be, he was here today and gone tomorrow. That's true for all of us. And any problems that we're surrounded by? They too shall pass.

We've made our modern life so complicated and stressful for ourselves. And I think we need to pull back, pause and reflect that for hundreds of thousands of years we lived differently. In the past, when circumstances were difficult and lives were pain-ridden, threatened by war and disease, they still found it in their hearts to make expressions that have haunted our imaginations for thousands of years. The fact that they could do that in the unimaginably hard world that they inhabited should inspire us to be so much happier in our world and time. H

MORE FROM US

Listen to an extended version of this interview with Neil Oliver on our podcast soon at **historyextra.com/podcast**

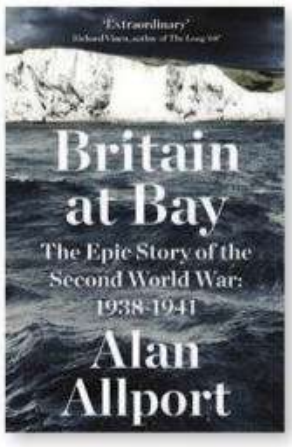
Keeping calm and carrying on
East Londoners made homeless by German bombing in c1940. Alan Allport's new book is "sympathetic to the plight of those beneath the bombs"

GETTY IMAGES

SECOND WORLD WAR

A nation at war

DANIEL TODMAN applauds an ambitious and meticulously constructed book on Britain's role in the Second World War that draws on an immense volume of research



Britain at Bay: The Epic Story of the Second World War, 1938–41
by Alan Allport
Profile, 608 pages, £25

Cutting-edge multi-volume histories of Britain in the Second World War are, it seems, like buses: you wait ages for one and then two turn up at the same time. As the other person recently to have undertaken the massive task that Alan Allport has started with *Britain at Bay* – the first of a two-volume history of wartime Britain – I feel uniquely qualified to comment on his achievement in this book. It is remarkable. This is a well-written, insightful, beautifully constructed volume that will keep your attention with its art as well as its knowledge. If you are interested in Britain at war (and who gets a choice these days when the mythic versions of that history get repeated so often?), you should buy a copy.

The outline of events in this period is well known, the quantity of secondary literature to be taken into account immense. Allport picks two routes through the quagmire. One is to juxtapose a particularly English myth of a peaceful, unambitious people – Tolkien's shire folk – only belatedly roused to war, with the facts of imperial power, prejudice and discrimination. He does this from the start: by placing unaccustomed weight on what was happening in Northern Ireland during the 1930s, Allport punctures the notion not just that Britain was a peaceful place, but also that any brutality was confined to distant colonies. The dynamic tension

between the mythology of little England and the horrible reality of global power works through the book, illuminating Allport's discussion of 1940 and escalating with British strategists' concrete commitments to city bombing from autumn 1942 on.

Allport's second tactic is to opt for telling examples over encyclopaedic coverage of every aspect of the past. He uses this approach to compel readers to a different point of view or to emphasise the contingency of the historical moment. It is employed to brilliant effect in setting up the chapter on the fall of France, which he starts with the French *Dunkerque* – the battleship hit by the Royal Navy in its attack on the naval base at Mers-el-Kébir after the French surrender – rather than the British Dunkirk, the rescue of the Expeditionary Force from the far side of the Channel. Allport pulls a similar trick with a discussion of the Boulton Paul Defiant aircraft in his chapter on the Battle of Britain, highlighting how, if the Air Ministry had had its way, the disastrously performing fighter could have been the principal aircraft defending the UK in summer 1940. Why? Because it seemed like a good solution to the war they had anticipated in the late 1930s, rather than the conflict that had been transformed by the loss of Britain's major European ally.

For all his awareness of the complexity and contingencies of the past, Allport does not spare Britain's leaders for their blunders before and during the war. He is particularly harsh on Neville Chamberlain for his misplaced self-belief – not because politicians are meant to be likeable but because of the geo-strategic and domestic political misjudgments that his arrogance resulted in.

Allport, however, does not come across as all that interested in high politics. His focus is more on the history of military operations and the experiences of ordinary service personnel and civilians. His treatment of Britain's part in the disastrous battle for France in May–June 1940 is excellent – detailed to just the right extent to maintain concision, holistic in its treatment of air, land and sea, and thought-provoking not just about the campaign's outcome, but what would have been required for it to have been different. His discussion of the Blitz is similarly good – sympathetic to the plight of those beneath the bombs in cities across the country, as well as the curiosity and fear of those who heard the aircraft overhead but had to read newspapers, listen to the radio, or look at the newsreels to try to work out the effect on the ground.

Allport has clearly read – and made his mind up about – a great deal of the vast pile of secondary literature on all aspects of the early years of the conflict, but while he signposts the work of other historians he does not let this weight of scholarship impede the flow of his book. The interested reader can follow his research – and build their own bibliography of the best things to read – from his endnotes. Allport also makes impressive use of a wide variety of primary sources. As anyone who has read his previous volumes on demobilisation and the wartime British army would know, he has an unparalleled ear for the voices that convey the period.

Tellingly, perhaps, I have one criticism about style and another about content. Allport's habit of dropping in contemporary references (such as how many Twitter followers a historical celebrity would have had if they were alive now, or how some Britons think of the war today) are part of the immediacy and excitement of his work. Yet I wonder whether this anchors this book too particularly in the current moment, when it deserves a much longer lifetime. I would hope that people are still reading *Britain at Bay* when Twitter has gone the way of Myspace: it would be a shame if these references fell flat.

> **"Allport punctures the notion that Britain was a peaceful place, juxtaposing the mythology of little England with the horrible reality of global power"**

In terms of content, there is probably too little in this book about the growth of the war economy and the consequences, particularly for British workers. Crowbarring it in at the expense of Allport's tight narrative would not have been worth the cost, but it is difficult without an extended treatment to convey what effect this had on the lives of those who lived through the conflict. Perhaps it will get its place in the second volume – where the country will be at the peak of its economic mobilisation while its leaders struggle with all that means for the world to come.

Your bookshelf might already be groaning with Second World War titles, but I strongly recommend you make a double-space for these. You will benefit from it. H

Daniel Todman is the author of the two-volume history *Britain's War* (Penguin, 2016 & 2020)

FRAN MONKS

AUTHORS ON THE PODCAST

Sarah Kovner on Japanese prisoner-of-war camps

"We sometimes think of war crimes as being intentional, as being committed by evil people. But I think some of the worst experiences come about through poor planning. And in this case, the leadership didn't care. There is nothing inherent to Japanese character or culture that led to the inhumane treatment of PoWs. The Japanese government and military never had a policy of abusing captivities."

Kate Summerscale on paranormal investigation in the 1930s

"The people who worked in psychical research – the ghost hunters – were very serious about finding scientific explanations for paranormal events. There was a lot of overlap between psychical research and psychoanalysis and other forms of experimental science. The newspapers were full of reports of experiments in telepathy, fortune telling and astral projection. It was very much aspiring to be a real science that was taken seriously."

Sudhir Hazareesingh on Toussaint Louverture

"Toussaint became one of the most iconic figures in the whole Atlantic world. Wherever there were struggles against slavery, whether it was in the Caribbean, South America, or the United States (where abolitionist movements started to develop big momentum from the 1820s onwards), the figure of Toussaint Louverture was very much held in high esteem."

MORE FROM US Listen to these episodes and more for free at **historyextra.com/podcast**

UNITED STATES

The path to power

MICHAEL CULLINANE recommends the impressive first volume of a balanced new biography charting the formative years of an iconic future president

JFK: Volume 1, 1917–1956
by Frederik Logevall
Viking, 816 pages, £30

In 1992, broadcaster Charlie Rose interviewed JFK biographer Nigel Hamilton and asked: "Why write about someone who's been written so much about?" Rose pointed out that three Kennedy biographies had been published that year alone. Hamilton demurred: "Ninety per cent of all books are about the assassination." An exaggeration, certainly, but Hamilton was right about the dearth of good biographies. Few authors have made use of the vast archival resources to cast a comprehensive portrait of Kennedy. Only Robert Dallek's *An Unfinished Life* (2001) comes close, and that book is now nearly 20 years old. Surprisingly, Kennedy is overdue for lengthy reappraisal, and Pulitzer prize-winning historian Fredrik Logevall aims to plug the gap.

In the first of two volumes, Logevall examines the early years (1917–56) and, at more than 800 pages, aims for exhaustiveness and balance. Logevall comes to JFK at an opportune moment. The first presidential biographies gushed with praise from loving contemporaries who lionised Kennedy. Then came the stinging revision that cast him as reckless and immoral, a product of his unscrupulous father. Logevall settles somewhere in the middle. He avoids the extremes by keeping the focus on the man and his context. Family, friends and political allies surrounded Kennedy; they influenced and enabled his rise, but they did not define him. His father, Joe, is often credited with pushing John into politics. Not so, Logevall writes.

JFK's determination was matched with modesty. Although his first political campaigns boasted about his war heroics, the candidate himself avoided any mention. Chapter by chapter, Logevall depicts a self-aware young man who understood his times, his place in the family, the importance of friendship and the value of public service.

On the up John F Kennedy (right) at the 1956 Democratic Convention in Chicago. The first volume of a new biography by Frederik Logevall covers the future president's early years and rise through the political ranks

GETTY IMAGES

> **"We find a young intellectual in school essays, a sickly boy in the medical records, an insatiable libido in letters, and charisma from oral histories"**

It is possible to see the green shoots of an adroit diplomat and politician.

This portrayal will appeal equally to Democrats and Republicans, because Kennedy embraces the contradictions of the American experiment. He believed in the collective power of the New Deal, but admitted a reticence about expanding the federal government. He supported labour movements, but rejected ideology-led unions. On national security, the young JFK was not yet willing to "bear any burden" to defeat communism, yet considered the controversial Marshall Plan essential to preserve American influence in Europe. Kennedy came of age in the 'American Century' and his early career foreshadows the challenge for American leadership in a Manichean world.

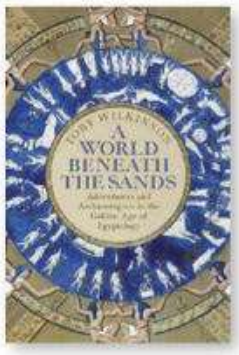
For those who will strip mine Logevall's biography for his research, the majesty awaits. The author scoured archives from coast to coast, with unparalleled access to previously classified research and materials retained by the Kennedy family. The use of evidence produces an intimate glimpse into Kennedy's early life. We find a young intellectual in the yarns of high school essays, a sickly boy in the medical records, an insatiable libido in letters to friends, and an infamous charisma from oral histories.

It's likely that, together with the much anticipated second volume on the presidential years, this will become the standard interpretation of Kennedy's life for years to come. H

Michael Cullinane is professor in 20th-century US history at the University of Roehampton

EGYPTOLOGY

Treasure hunters



A World Beneath the Sands: Adventurers and Archaeologists in the Golden Age of Egyptology
by Toby Wilkinson
Picador, 512 pages, £25

The year 2022 promises to be an exciting one for Egypto-philes, marking the bicentenary of the decoding of hieroglyphic script and the centenary of the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb. Inspired by this double celebration, Toby Wilkinson has taken the opportunity to reassess the story of the 'Golden Age' of Egyptology: the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Wilkinson features a galaxy of Egyptological superstars, ranging from the ex-circus strongman Giovanni Battista Belzoni using his engineering skills to transport monumental statuary and locate lost tombs, to the dedicated but hot-tempered Howard Carter persisting against all the odds in his belief that Tutankhamun still lay in the Valley of the Kings. Running parallel to their tales of fortune and glory is the story of Egypt's quest for independence and control over her archaeological heritage.

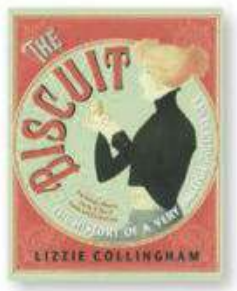
As Wilkinson notes, these stories have been told before. However, if the stories have not changed much over the years, the sensibilities of their modern readers have. We have become far more critical of our tomb-hunting forebears, and far less tolerant of biographies that shy away from difficult issues. We are less inclined to accept the idea that an archaeologist has the right to dig up – and in many cases destroy – any archaeological site. We wince when we read of cemeteries being excavated or mummies being unwrapped for no apparent reason. And we question the easy assumption that Egyptian artefacts are best preserved in western museums. The lack of sympathy shown towards the Egyptian peasants – an "unprepossessing population" in the words of novelist Amelia B Edwards, "the men half stealthy, half insolent" – seems particularly crass.

The debate over the decolonisation of Egyptology and the repatriation of artefacts has only just started. Wilkinson's elegantly written book provides a sound background and a useful bibliography that will allow readers to understand and participate in that debate. H

Joyce Tyldesley, professor of Egyptology at the University of Manchester

FOOD

Biscuit nation



The Biscuit: The History of a Very British Indulgence
by Lizzie Collingham
Bodley Head, 320 pages, £18.99

Bill Bryson reckoned that only the British could get excited by "a hot beverage and a small plain biscuit"; the odds are that he'll be a lot more understanding of our enthusiasms once he's read this fascinating book. It traces the long life of the biscuit, from its origins thousands of years ago in the need to preserve grain by its twice-baking, through the industrialisation of production, to, ultimately, the mass consumption of sweet fancies in the 20th century. The biscuit's journey encompasses empires, whether the petrified bakeries of Pompeii or the global expansions fuelled by hardtack, where the descriptions of sailors' rations alive with weevils are stomach-churning.

It may have ended up as a British indulgence, but the biscuit travelled across time and cultures, its shape ever shifting to reflect national tastes, whether in the addition of sugar by early Islamic confectioners or eggs by the bakers of the Italian Renaissance. It is the lodestone around which the seismic changes of history are organised and their excitements conveyed – the power of the industrial revolution is captured beautifully in Henry Mayhew's 1865 visit to Peek Frean's Bermondsey factory and the thrill of "biscuits by machinery!".

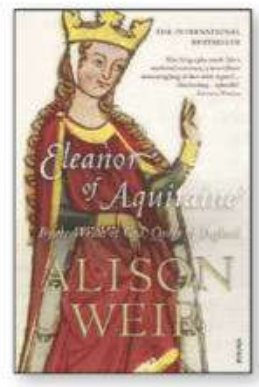
Collingham is a wonderful researcher, combining academic rigour with an eye for the captivating details that make the world more interesting: find out why Americans came to call scones 'biscuits' and how waffles emerged from the unleavened matzoth of Passover. She also has insightful observations on the ambiguity of biscuits: bread, cake or confectionery? A snack or the mainstay of a meal?

Sometimes the structure doesn't quite work – interweaving chronology and themes results in overlaps – but that is a minor point in a narrative that never loses its grip on the "special kind of necessity" that is the biscuit. H

Rachel Duffett, author of *The Stomach for Fighting: Food and the Soldiers of the Great War* (Manchester University Press, 2012)

THE CLASSIC BOOK

Nicola Tallis on an inspiring biography of a medieval matriarch



Eleanor of Aquitaine: By the Wrath of God, Queen of England
by Alison Weir
(first published 1999)

Eleanor of Aquitaine is one of the most controversial queens in English history, so it is unsurprising that she has long been a cause of fascination for novelists and biographers alike. When I read Alison Weir's gripping biography, her telling of Eleanor's story captivated me – so much so that it inspired me to go to university and study history.

Eleanor was the wife, mother and grandmother of kings, and by all accounts a woman of exceptional character, beauty and intelligence. Having meticulously researched her subject, Weir acknowledges that the sources for Eleanor's life are fragmentary, but nevertheless succeeds in achieving her goal of providing "a credible and balanced account".

In her 82 years, Eleanor courted scandal, reputedly indulging in an affair with her uncle, and encouraging her sons to rebel against her husband, Henry II – the latter of which resulted in a spell of imprisonment lasting 16 years. This is all unpicked in the book, as are the many myths that have attached themselves to Eleanor in the 800 years since her death. These include the accusation that she murdered Henry II's mistress, a story that Weir makes clear has no basis in fact.

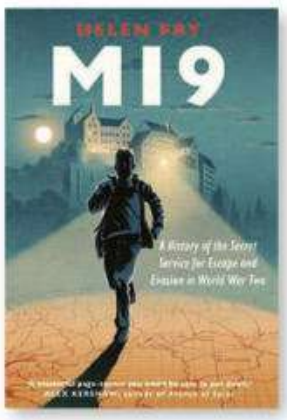
For anyone interested in the tumultuous beginnings of the House of Plantagenet, this book is a must: Weir provides a compelling narrative that paints a vivid picture of the 12th-century queen and the extraordinary world in which she lived. H

Nicola Tallis's latest book is *Uncrowned Queen: The Fateful Life of Margaret Beaufort, Tudor Matriarch* (Michael O' Mara, 2019)

SECOND WORLD WAR

Hitting a home run

NIGEL JONES enjoys a new book on MI9's mission to help Britons escape Nazi-occupied Europe, filled with stories of eccentric inventors, danger and derring-do



MI9 : A History of the Secret Service for Escape and Evasion in World War Two
by Helen Fry
Yale, 352 pages, £20

Thanks to movies like *The Great Escape* and the ludicrous sitcom *'Allo 'Allo!* the role of escapers in the Second World War has become almost a comic cliché in the popular imagination, masking the desperate dangers run, and the sacrifices made, by the escapers themselves and the brave civilians of Nazi-occupied Europe who helped them.

In particular the part played by MI9 – the British intelligence agency set up to assist PoWs and stranded servicemen make successful 'home runs' back to Blighty – has been overshadowed by the attention-grabbing exploits of the Special Operations Executive, another agency formed by Churchill to "set Europe ablaze" with acts of sabotage in conjunction with the homegrown resistance movements fighting the Axis.

With this book, seasoned Second World War historian Helen Fry aims to draw MI9 out of the shadows. She demonstrates convincingly that the agency played a vital role, not only by helping escapers evade the enemy, but by providing intelligence and assistance to the Allied cause just as crucial to eventual victory as the more spectacular service rendered by its better-known SOE rivals.

Founded on the outbreak of war as a sub-section of Britain's official foreign secret service, MI6, MI9 established itself as an independent entity when it moved out of London to a country estate, Wilton Park. Here one of Fry's heroes, the genius inventor Christopher Hutton – much like Q in the James Bond films – had the space to develop a huge range of gadgets to aid escape efforts.

Hutton's wheezes included concealable silk maps, suits that could be converted into German uniforms, miniature compasses, tools to saw through bars and pick locks, fake ID cards and even real banknotes disguised as Monopoly money, which were sent into PoW camps like Stalag Luft III and the infamous Colditz Castle under the guise of board games in innocent charity parcels.

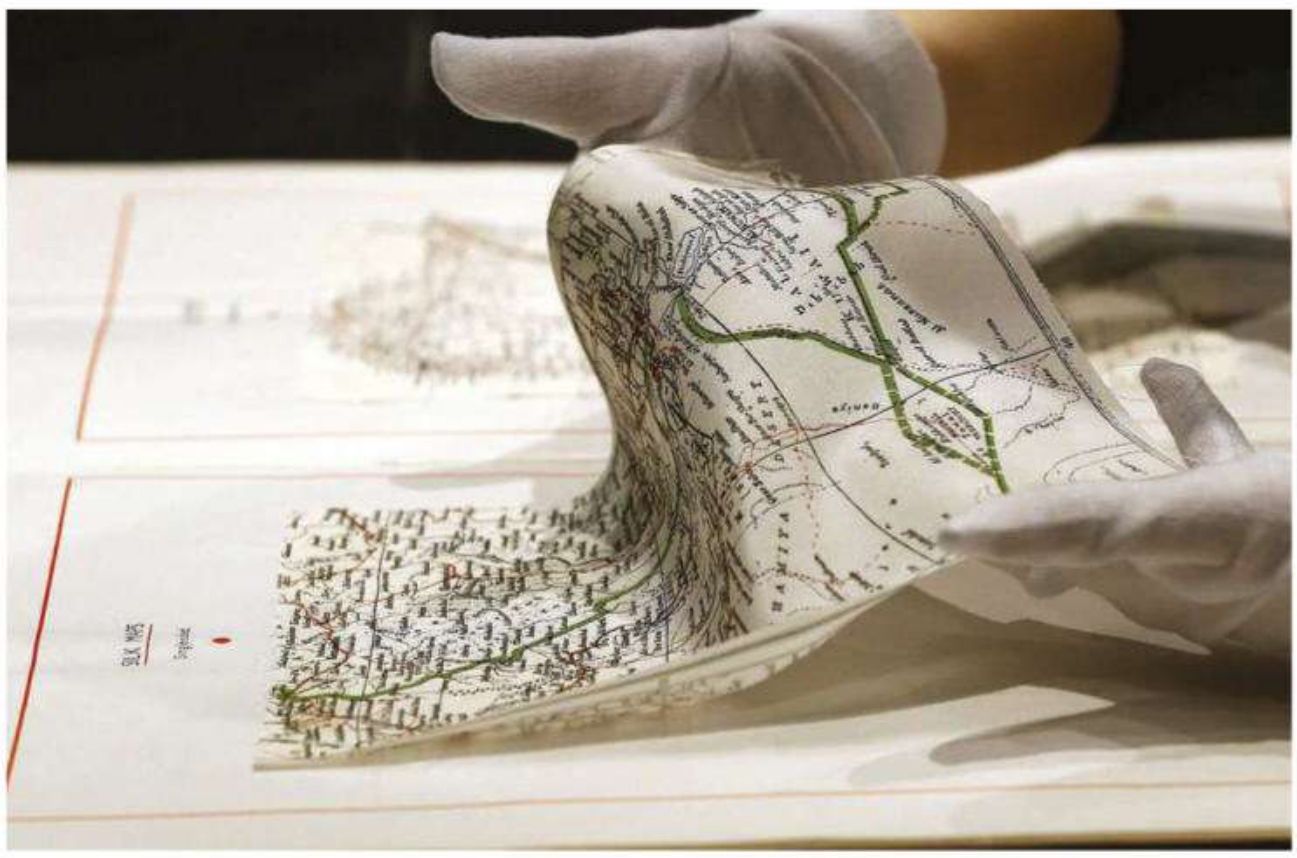
Another of Fry's heroes is Jimmy Langley, who, despite losing an arm in action, successfully escaped to Britain and used his experience to organise MI9 escape lines which smuggled both downed airmen and runaway PoWs through France and across the Pyrenees to freedom. Famously, Airey Neave, who made the first 'home run' from Colditz, was also recruited by MI9 for his first-hand escaping expertise. Astonishingly, Fry tells us, no fewer than 23,000 servicemen got back to Britain thanks to MI9.

> **Hutton's wheezes included silk maps, suits that converted into German uniforms, miniature compasses and even real banknotes disguised as Monopoly money**

It was the up-to-date intel on the enemy provided by the returnees at their debriefing, Fry argues, that qualifies MI9 to be considered a vital and hitherto undervalued intelligence asset in its own right. She suggests that it could have done even more had it not been for the envious efforts of Claude Dansey, deputy chief of MI6, to control, frustrate and possibly even betray MI9 operatives as part of an inter-agency turf war.

Fry writes in a rather flat style, belying the exciting events she describes, and jumping somewhat haphazardly from subject to subject. However, her book is deeply researched, packed with facts and, all in all, a worthy tribute to the courage, ingenuity and spirit of men and women who overcame incredible odds and risked torture, deportation and death to win freedom both for themselves and for Europe as a whole. H

Nigel Jones is an author and historian whose books include *Countdown to Valkyrie: The July Plot to Assassinate Hitler* (Frontline, 2009)



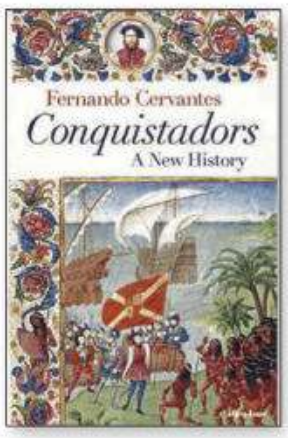
Gadgets and gizmos As part of its mission to help British servicemen escape from Nazi-occupied Europe, MI9 developed a range of James Bond-esque tools, such as the detailed silk maps seen here

SHUTTERSTOCK

GLOBAL

Not the whole picture

CAMILLA TOWNSEND considers a reassessment of the Spanish conquest with a blind spot for indigenous experience



Conquistadors: A New History
by Fernando Cervantes
Allen Lane, 512 pages, £30

Fernando Cervantes has produced a veritable compendium on the Spanish conquest of the Americas, covering the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico and South America. But painting a vast canvas was not the author's only goal: he wished to resuscitate the reputation of these once admired but recently maligned men. In his introduction, he points out that the "ease with which we condemn the [conquistadors] often tells us more about the modern sense of shame [concerning what happened]… than it does about the people who initiated these processes without an inkling of where they would lead". Cervantes also reminds us that, in condemning the conquistadors, we are not quite as modern as we may like to think, for negative opinions of Spain "have a long pedigree". He hopes that by "attending to the diaries, letters [and] chronicles… produced by the conquistadors, their supporters and their detractors" he can offer us a sometimes surprising story that convinces us the conquistadors were real people, and moreover that, in their own way, they achieved greatness.

As a professor of early American history myself, I can attest to the fact that modern students are often overly eager to condemn 16th-century Spaniards, and they are often startlingly ignorant of the ways in which the latter can be observed to have behaved exactly like English colonisers in similar environments. So the book is welcome, and it most certainly meets its goal of presenting the colonisers as real people – products of their times who were at least occasionally admirable.

At the same time, the book is troubling in its steadfast refusal to take indigenous people seriously: they, too, were very real, and their struggles and suffering are equally deserving of our attention. Cervantes never makes racist assertions; he simply isn't interested in non-European peoples. For instance, he briefly acknowledges that the *encomienda* system, through which Spain extracted labour from unwilling indigenous people, was "an abusive practice", and when an indigenous queen is murdered in the Caribbean, he calls it "a deeply tragic moment". But then the narrative continues on its regular track, a tale of competition among vibrant Europeans, never of upheaval in the lives of others.

In the famous story of the fall of Mexico, the author asserts that the indigenous people were expecting the return of their god, Quetzalcoatl – but this narrative has been thoroughly debunked by Mesoamericanists. Later, because he does know the scholarly literature, he suddenly acknowledges "it is true that no one seems to have mentioned Quetzalcoatl at the time", but then says it was nevertheless true that gloom and fear descended on the Aztecs, implying that we should simply go with the old idea. Over and over, he demonstrates that, although he has been exposed to modern, careful research on the indigenous people's perspectives, he remains unmoved.

Since Professor Cervantes is clearly a talented man, and his book is staggeringly thorough in its own way, perhaps the fault lies with those of us who study the native people's roles in the age of exploration: we must learn to reach our audiences more effectively. Or perhaps the work of incorporating respect for both Spaniards and indigenous peoples must of necessity be the project of the next generation, raised without the prejudices and political arguments of our own. H

Camilla Townsend is distinguished professor of history at Rutgers University

PAUL WOLFGANG WEBSTER

> **"Cervantes tells a tale of competition among vibrant Europeans, never of upheaval in the lives of indigenous peoples"**

FROM FACT TO FICTION

All in the mind

CD Major on her haunting new historical novel, *The Other Girl*

What can you tell us about your new novel, and the real cases that inspired it?
The Other Girl is set in the largest lunatic asylum in New Zealand the morning after a devastating fire in 1942, which killed 37 women locked in their ward overnight. There were only two survivors. This shocking incident really did happen, and that's what I used as a starting point for the story.

In my book, the intriguing 20-year-old Edith, one of the survivors, sparks the interest of the newest doctor to join the asylum. Declan learns Edith was incarcerated as a child for supposedly having 'past life' memories. This strand of the book was inspired by reports of children like James Leininger – a boy from the US who came out with numerous statements about being a Second World War pilot that turned out to be true.

Why does 1940s New Zealand make a good setting for a thriller story?
Seacliff as a place was an extraordinary asylum and a creepy setting for this kind of book. And in terms of the fire itself, people suggest that shortages of staff, due to the demands of war, made the tragedy worse. The patrols of nurses were few and far between, meaning there was a delay in raising the alarm.

How is working on a historical novel different from writing modern fiction?
There are a lot more similarities than you might think. I also write feelgood reads under the name Rosie Blake, and with those, you still have to consider character, setting, pace, conflict, emotion, point of view and more. You also still have to research – maybe your character is a hairdresser so you interview one. Or you might need to know how to play whist. Historical research can be more book-based and a total rabbit-hole, but with any book, essentially you are always trying to write a fascinating, gripping story – whatever the time period.

The Other Girl
by CD Major
(Thomas & Mercer, 301 pages, £8.99)

Look out for our virtual lecture series

BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE LIVE

We are hosting a programme of virtual events this autumn, online and available globally. Wherever you are, tune in to see one of our renowned historians talking about their new book. Each lecture lasts 45 minutes and is followed by a 30-minute Q&A session. You'll also have the opportunity to pre-order a signed copy of the book via independent bookseller Fox Lane Books.

FOX LANE BOOKS

Margaret Macmillan
Why Are There Wars?

The reasons why we go to war may lie in human nature or society – or even in the availability of the means to fight. This thought-provoking talk grapples with why groups and individuals fight, and why war became more deadly and total in the 20th century, before examining war today and considering what the future might hold.

Tuesday 13 October 2020, 7pm

Laurence Rees
Hitler and Stalin: The Tyrants and the Second World War

Laurence Rees has met hundreds of people who experienced life under Hitler's and Stalin's rule – not just those who suffered, but those who enthusiastically supported the dictators, too. Over the years he started thinking about the comparison between the leaders and their regimes. What were the key differences? And in what ways were the regimes similar?

Thursday 26 November 2020, 7pm

Seb Falk
Monks, Manuscripts and Medieval Machines: Science in the not-so-Dark Ages

Imaginative, eclectic scientific theories shaped medieval people's views of the universe and their place in it. This richly illustrated talk will bring the medieval worldview to life, revealing the complex relationship between science and religion.

Thursday 29 October 2020, 7pm

Toby Wilkinson
A World Beneath the Sands: The Rediscovery of Ancient Egypt

Meet the men and women whose obsession with Egypt's ancient civilisation drove them to uncover its secrets. Their work helped to enrich and transform our understanding of the Nile valley and its people, and left a lasting impression on Egypt, too.

Thursday 10 December 2020, 7pm

Ian Mortimer
The Time Traveller's Guide to Regency Britain

A time of exuberance, thrills, frills and unchecked bad behaviour, the Regency was perhaps the last age of true freedom before the arrival of the stifling world of Victorian morality. It was also a period of transition that reflected unprecedented social, economic and political change.

Thursday 12 November 2020, 7pm

Michael Wood
The Story of China: A Portrait of a Civilisation and its People

Michael Wood shares stories from his highly praised new book, a grand sweep of the history of the world's oldest continuous civilisation: "a tale of astounding drama, fabulous creativity and deep humanity".

Tuesday 22 December 2020, 7pm

GETTY IMAGES/FRAN MONKS/MICK KAVANAGH/JASON BYE

Tickets cost £10. Book now at **historyextra.com/events/virtual-lecture**

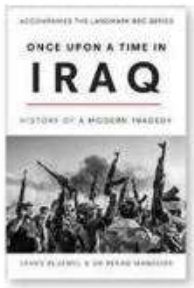
WORDS BY **ELLIE CAWTHORNE** AND **MATT ELTON**

ELF

ALSO ON THE BOOKSHELF

21ST CENTURY

Once Upon a Time in Iraq
by James Bluemel and Dr Renad Mansour
(BBC Books, 416 pages, £20)

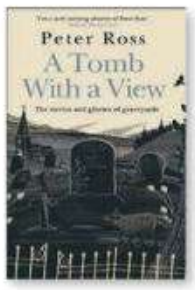


The horrors of war

Accompanying a recent landmark BBC series, this book tells the story of the Iraq War through the eyes of those who witnessed it firsthand – from US marines and foreign journalists to Iraqi teenagers. Taken from more than 100 hours of interviews, the powerful and disturbing testimonies reveal the chaotic way events escalated on the ground, and highlight the staggering human cost of the conflict.

SOCIAL

A Tomb With a View
by Peter Ross
(Headline, 368 pages, £20)



A walk among the tombstones

Graveyards are evocative places – spooky to many, but teeming with stories for the historically curious. In this tour of Britain's burial plots, Peter Ross unearths unexpected tales of remarkable lives – and deaths. Funny and warm-hearted as often as it is gloomy or ghoulish, the book is as much concerned with the living who hang around in graveyards (or "parks for introverts") as the dead lying beneath them.

FICTION

When I Come Home Again
by Caroline Scott
(Simon & Schuster, 469 pages, £16.99)

Unknown soldier

The author of 2019's *The Photographer of the Lost* returns to the aftermath of the First World War for this second novel. In 1918, a uniformed soldier is found wandering the streets of Durham with no memory of who he is. When three different women all claim him as a lost loved one, the traumatised veteran is forced to try to piece together the shards of his memory to make sense of his former life.

CHILDREN'S

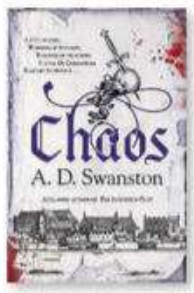
Black and British: A Short, Essential History
by David Olusoga
(Macmillan Children's, 176 pages, £6.99)

Hidden figures

Amid current debates about decolonising schools' history curriculum, the release of this new junior edition of David Olusoga's award-winning *Black and British* (originally published in 2017) could hardly feel more timely. Intended for readers aged 12+, this long-overdue overview traces the black British experience from the African Romans guarding Hadrian's Wall right up to the modern day.

FICTION

Chaos
by AD Swanston
(Bantam, 400 pages, £18.99)

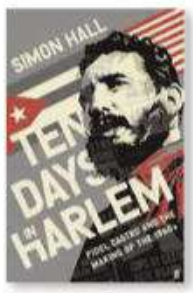


Counterfeiting and conspiracy

Elizabethan intrigue continues to be a big draw for readers of historical fiction, and this sequel to 2017's *Incendium* plunges deep into courtly drama. During the freezing winter of 1574, Dr Christopher Radcliffe is on the trail of counterfeit currency bearing the likeness of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. And, if that's not enough to contend with, whispers suggest treachery is afoot at the very heart of royal life.

INTERNATIONAL

Ten Days in Harlem: Fidel Castro and the Making of the 1960s
by Simon Hall
(Faber, 288 pages, £17.99)



Shaping the sixties

In September 1960, Fidel Castro arrived in New York to attend the General Assembly of the United Nations. He'd been sworn in as prime minister of Cuba the year before, and over the next 10 days he met with other leaders and radical figures such as Malcolm X. It was a period, Simon Hall argues, that would transform the Cold War – and spark a decade of unrest that would reshape world politics.

SOCIAL

Ellis Island: A People's History
by Małgorzata Szejnert
(Scribe, 400 pages, £20)

Island stories

Although it's famous as the busiest point of immigration into the United States throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, New York's Ellis Island was also the site of less idealistic sides of US history. From the internments of PoWs during the First and Second World Wars, to deportations based on social discrimination, this emotive account charts its central role in decades of American political life.

CULTURAL

It Takes Two: A History of Couples Who Dared to Be Different
by Cathy Newman
(William Collins, 336 pages, £20)

Dynamic duos

This renunciation of the 'great man' theory of history – in which the trajectories of entire nations are wrought by lone individuals – instead focuses on the power of two. It's a pleasingly broad rendering of the idea of the 'couple': there are romantic pairings here, of all sexualities, but important too are the creative and platonic partnerships that yielded great art, radical science and political reform. H

Big dig
Historian Yasmin Khan inside a giant excavation tent at St James Gardens in London. It's among the sites along the UK's forthcoming high-speed railway route HS2 that are being explored by experts

LION TELEVISION

ENCOUNTERS

86 DIARY: LISTEN / WATCH / VISIT / TASTE
By **Jonathan Wright**, **Samantha Nott** and **Matt Elton**
92 EXPLORE... Rye, East Sussex

WATCH

Lines to the past

HS2, the new high-speed railway linking London to Birmingham and beyond, is a mammoth undertaking. An official review leaked to the *Financial Times* in January suggested that the eventual cost may be in excess of £100bn. In this context, the millions spent on upwards of a thousand archaeologists to dig at key historical sites along the route seems like small change.

Yet the scale of these operations is made clear in the first episode in a three-part series charting the work of the archaeologists. It follows the excavations at St James Gardens in Euston, site of the line's London terminus. The area was a cemetery for a little more than 60 years from 1788 onward, and hundreds of archaeologists have been at work carefully uncovering graves at the site, working beneath a vast temporary canopy. Up close, the scale is breathtaking.

As anthropologist Alice Roberts and historian Yasmin Khan discover, many of these largely Georgian-era remains are remarkably well preserved. In some cases, individuals can be identified – from, for example, coffin nameplates – and this is the cue for the programme to research the lives of some of the approximately 61,000 souls who were laid to rest at St James.

The documentary also follows work in Birmingham, where excavations at the Park Street burial ground have revealed much about the lives of Brummies during the industrial revolution.

Britain's Biggest Dig
BBC iPlayer / Streaming now

An illustration from Milton's 1638 poem *Lycidas*. A radio drama explores its parallels with a work by Tennyson

LISTEN

To have loved and lost

More than two centuries separated the publication of John Milton's *Lycidas* (1638) and Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1850), yet the texts have striking similarities. Both were written by poets in their twenties responding to the unexpected death of a male friend who was also a fellow poet and rival: respectively, Edward King and Arthur Hallam.

Both poets rose to the challenge – and, in Tennyson's case, the additional test of trying to write work as profound as his idol, Milton – yet produced very different works, as a new two-part drama explores. Holliday Grainger, best known for *Strike*, leads the cast as Emily, wife of Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Elegies

BBC Radio 4 / Expected to air Sunday 4 October

An interactive exhibit at Plymouth's new The Box museum, which is marking the 400th anniversary of the *Mayflower*'s voyage in 1620

VISIT

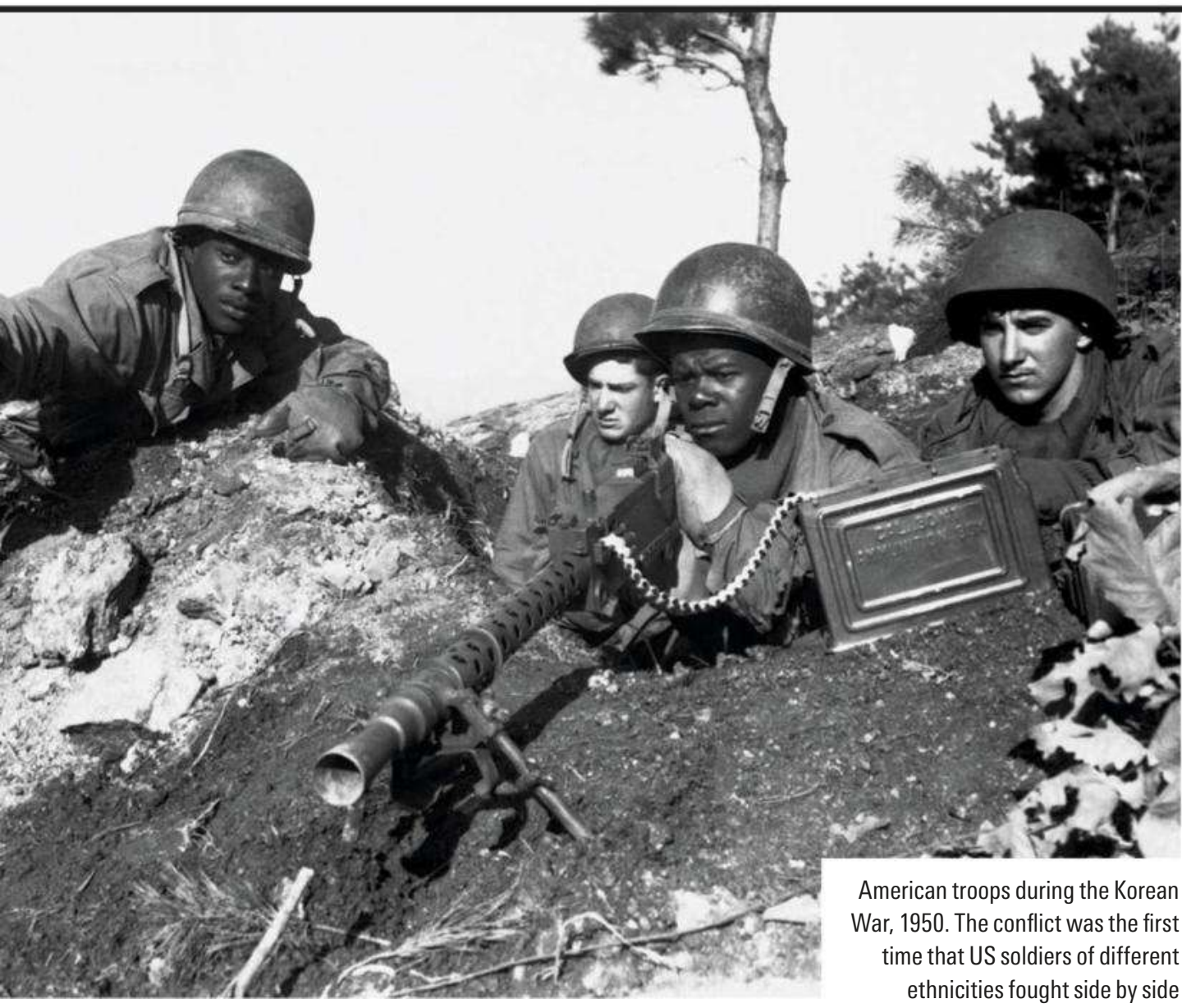
Momentous journey

Among the litany of historical anniversaries overshadowed by the disruption and deprivations of the coronavirus outbreak, the 1620 voyage of the *Mayflower* had perhaps the largest global impact. It's fitting, then, that its story is now being told by a major new museum.

Plymouth's recently launched The Box has worked with institutions in the UK, US and the Netherlands to curate objects charting English efforts to reach America. The exhibition also explores the historical context as well as the impact on America's indigenous people.

Mayflower 400: Legend and Legacy

The Box, Plymouth / Open until 18 September 2021 / *theboxplymouth.com*



American troops during the Korean War, 1950. The conflict was the first time that US soldiers of different ethnicities fought side by side

LISTEN

Fighting prejudice

On 26 July 1948, US president Harry S Truman signed Executive Order 9981, which paved the way for abolishing discrimination "on the basis of race, color, religion or national origin" in the United States military. Two years later, the Korean War broke out and, for the first time, rather than black and white soldiers serving in separate units, troops of different ethnicities fought together.

As journalist Brian Palmer outlines in a longer version of an excellent programme that was first broadcast on Radio 4 in August, this was a momentous change whose effects on US society spread far beyond the armed forces. It's a story that Palmer tells with the help of the archives and new interviews, both with renowned historians and fascinating figures such as 89-year-old Doug Wilder, who fought in Korea and later became governor of Virginia.

Fighting Together in Korea

BBC World Service / Expected to air Saturday 24 October

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE BOX

Presenter Alison Hammond heads to Hampton Court Palace in her quest to illuminate the lives of black people who are often obscured from British history

WATCH

Overlooked stories

It's Black History Month in October, an event which ITV is marking with a short season of programmes. In Alison Hammond: Back To School, the TV presenter and actor goes on a personal odyssey to highlight black figures missing from the pages of textbooks. It's a journey that takes in such historically important sites as Hadrian's Wall and Hampton Court.

Sorry, I Didn't Know is a panel show hosted by Jimmy Akingbola (star of sitcom *Kate And Koji*). It features comedians from diverse backgrounds demonstrating what they do – and often don't – know about black history. Documentary Black Comedy Legends, meanwhile, salutes figures such as funnyman and former professional footballer Charlie Williams, whose appearances on ITV's *The Comedians* in the 1970s paved the way for others.

Black History Month season
ITV / October

WEEKLY TV & RADIO
Visit *historyextra.com* for weekly updates on upcoming TV and radio programmes

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"Every nation has been affected by the culture enslaved peoples created, whether it's fashion or food"

Writer and broadcaster **AFUA HIRSCH** tells us about her new series tracing the story of the transatlantic slave trade, which she co-presents alongside actor Samuel L Jackson and investigative journalist Simcha Jacobovici

The series is called *Enslaved: The Lost History of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*. Is the 'lost' in its title important?
It is important because few people realise, for example, that the Atlantic Ocean is literally littered with the wreckage of slave ships. The ocean has become a site of trauma for so many African diasporas – and yet the actual remnants of that experience have never really been seen. We haven't seen concerted efforts to dive the wrecks, explore them, and tell their stories. And they tell so many *different* stories – atrocities in which slaves were thrown overboard, rebellions and mutinies at sea, and terrible accidents.

How does the series tell those stories?
We tell them through objects and archaeological sites [including dives to wrecks]. To give an example, in Rio de Janeiro, I saw amulet bracelets that enslaved people wore in a heartbreaking effort just to keep a remnant of home or to try to protect themselves from the foreboding sense of tragedy that was facing them. Such items have been recovered from mass graves. Having survived the Middle Passage [in which enslaved people were transported to the Americas], many people just died on arrival, dropped dead from exhaustion, hunger and dehydration, and they were thrown into a mass grave in which local people also threw household rubbish.

Were you trying to talk about different African experiences of slavery, to construct a more nuanced cultural history?
Absolutely. We tend to talk about the transatlantic slave trade as one phenomenon, and the story of enslavement as one experience. But actually, if you were trafficked through a slave port in what's now Ghana to Pernambuco in Brazil to work on sugar plantations, that was a very different experience to if you were taken from a different part of Africa and trafficked to Virginia to work on tobacco plantations.

Going into these stories and understanding what people experienced, and the cultural legacies, is really important. Every single nation has been affected by the culture those enslaved peoples created, whether it's fashion or hip-hop; food or the aesthetics of art.

What was it like filming with your co-presenter Samuel L Jackson?
He went on a personal journey in the series, regarding his own heritage and his own story. It was very humbling to be with him on that journey. Also he just is *himself*, which makes it different to anything else I'll ever work on. So that was a real joy. H

Enslaved: The Lost History of the Transatlantic Slave Trade is set to be broadcast on BBC Two from Sunday 4 October. Read more from this interview at *historyextra.com/enslaved-qa*

Afua Hirsch with her *Enslaved* co-presenters Simcha Jacobovici and Samuel L Jackson

These miniature French pastries mix crunchy, smooth and sweet

TASTE

Classic canelés

These pastries originate from the region around Bordeaux, France, and some sources suggest their origins can be traced to between the 15th and 18th centuries. They're a great treat with a cup of coffee or, if you're feeling particularly decadent, for breakfast. We have used silicone moulds, rather than the traditional copper moulds.

Difficulty: 4/10
Time: The mixture needs to be prepared two days beforehand and left in the fridge. Baking time is 1 hour and 45 minutes

INGREDIENTS

For the canelés:
450ml whole milk
3 tbsp dark rum
1 tsp vanilla extract
100g plain flour
50g butter
Pinch of sea salt
Five large egg yolks
175g caster sugar

For the beeswax coating:
30g beeswax
30g butter

METHOD

1. Heat the milk in a pan until it just reaches the boil, then remove from the heat and stir in the vanilla and rum.
2. If you have a food processor, add the butter, flour and salt and pulse until it resembles small breadcrumbs. (If you don't have a food processor, rub those ingredients together by hand.) Add the sugar and egg yolks to that mixture and pulse, or stir with a fork, until they are properly mixed in. Turn the processor on to a low speed, or gently stir, and begin adding the hot milk in a slow stream. Mix until the batter is just combined.
3. Strain through a sieve into a clean bowl, cover with cling film (which should touch the batter), and refrigerate for 24–48 hours.
4. When you're ready to bake, preheat the oven to 190°C. Place the moulds on a baking tray and put them in the oven to warm through for five minutes. Melt the beeswax and butter in a small pan and paint it carefully on to the inside of the moulds. A silicone brush might be useful.
5. Turn the moulds upside down above a wire rack placed over baking paper to let any excess drip out. If your kitchen is cold, the beeswax will set nearly instantly; if not, put the moulds in the freezer for 15 minutes.
6. Remove the moulds from the freezer, and pour the batter into the waxed canelé moulds, filling them about three-quarters full. If you have more batter than you do moulds, you can return it to the fridge for later use.
7. Bake for 1 hour and 45 minutes. (Silicone moulds need slightly longer than copper ones, so take those out nearer the 75-minute mark.) The bottoms of the canelés should be a rich brown; they won't be firm at this point, but you should be able to press them gently with a finger.
8. Allow the canelés to cool for five minutes, then turn the moulds over on to a wire rack (be careful – the silicone will be hot). The canelés will come out, but may need a bit of patience. They will firm up as they cool.

Recipe by The Vintage Chef, Olivia Potts: life.spectator.co.uk/articles/cook-classic-caneles

An outdoor sound system at Notting Hill Carnival, 1989. A new exhibition explores the influence of dub music and culture on London communities

SAMANTHA NOTT/ ADRIAN BOOT–URBANIMAGE

VISIT

Dub mixes

The key role that music can play in building and shaping a community is the focus of a new exhibition at the Museum of London, which explores the influence of dub music on the UK's capital over the past 50 years.

With roots in Jamaican reggae and an emphasis on rhythm, dub expanded to incorporate remixing and studio manipulation. As a pioneering form of electronic music, it informed the development of genres such as hip-hop and techno, inspired London's early punk scene, and spawned its own subgenres, from jungle to drum and bass.

This is no exercise in music theory, though. Discover the stories of key figures, see the places in which they met – in Hackney, Lambeth and Ladbroke Grove – and learn how music existed alongside fashion and faith. And, most importantly, bring headphones.

Dub London: Bassline of a City
Museum of London / 2 October–31 January / *mol.org.uk*

VISIT

Burton begins

How did Richard Jenkins Jr emerge from a tough upbringing in Glamorgan to become, as Richard Burton, one of the most lauded actors of the 20th century? That's the question behind an exhibition at National Museum Cardiff, which highlights the people and places that had a lasting legacy on the actor's later career.

Featuring diaries and personal objects held at Swansea University, many of which are on show for the first time, this is a chance to get to know a man often obscured by the spotlight of fame and the fascination with his love life, most notably his marriages to Elizabeth Taylor. It's also a reminder of a remarkable creative talent.

Becoming Richard Burton
National Museum Cardiff / 7 November–11 April / *museum.wales/cardiff*

Richard Burton pictured in 1951, in his mid-twenties. He went on to star in plays and films including *Hamlet* and *Look Back in Anger*

WATCH & LISTEN

In praise of museums

Although the number of coronavirus cases in the UK appears to be rising as we go to press, lockdowns are – at least for now – less strict, allowing for museums and galleries to cautiously reopen. Against this backdrop, the BBC's #MuseumPassion season represents a timely celebration of museums and their role in wider society.

Inside Museums (BBC Four) anchors the season by guiding viewers through four exhibitions and collections. Guides include presenter and musician Cerys Matthews, who shares her love of St Fagans National Museum of History in Cardiff, an open-air collection chronicling Welsh culture and the country's distinctive architecture.

For a special edition of **Inside Culture with Mary Beard** (BBC Two), the classicist and her guests consider how institutions should respond to a changed world post-lockdown. Meanwhile, BBC Radio 3 will air a **Sunday Feature** on museums presented by the director of Tate Modern, Frances Morris, and a **Free Thinking** debate on the future of museums, featuring international figures such as Mikhail Borisovich Piotrovsky, director of St Petersburg's Hermitage.

The One Show (BBC One, Monday 12 October), meanwhile, will reveal the winners of the Museum of the Year prize – institutions that will be covered in further depth in **Front Row** (BBC Radio 4). H

#MuseumPassion season
on BBC Radio and TV, from Thursday 8 October

Mary Beard in the British Museum following its reopening in August. Beard's new programme explores how museums can adapt to a post-lockdown world

GETTY IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK

The marooned port town treasured by smugglers

Rye has a unique riches to rags and back again story, transitioning from a key port to a hotbed of smuggling and violence before becoming respectable once more. **NIGEL JONES** explores its chequered past

The tiny East Sussex town of Rye is a time capsule. It was once one of the Channel's most important ports, but coastal changes have left it stranded inland, separated from the sea. Its labyrinth of steep cobbled streets, once the haunt of smugglers, are now a picturesque tourist magnet, but the town's colourful and dramatic past is still bound to these twisting streets and alleys.

In 1377, during the Hundred Years' War, Rye was raided, pillaged and burned by the French, who carried away the bells of St Mary's parish church. Undaunted, Rye's menfolk staged a cross-Channel revenge raid the following year and succeeded in recovering the bells. If you visit the town today, you can hear their music pealing from the church.

To prevent any future French pillaging, a town wall was built. This defensive structure's turreted gatehouse, the Landgate, survives to this day, along with the Ypres Tower, an imposing fortress later used as the town's jail, and now a fascinating museum of Rye's history.

Together with its neighbour, Winchelsea, Rye was one of the Cinque Ports – a confederation of Channel towns granted special tax privileges. But when a series of storms in the 14th century changed the courses of the three rivers that meet at Rye – the Rother, Brede and Tillingham – its harbour started silting up, and its economic importance began to decline.

Cash-strapped, the town turned to smuggling. Many of its citizens were involved in exporting sheep wool from the surrounding Romney Marsh as well as the illegal import of, in the words of Rudyard Kipling's poem *A Smugglers' Song*, "Brandy for the parson / Baccy for the clerk / Laces for a lady / Letters for a spy."

> **"The Hawkhurst Gang ruled the town in a reign of terror that lasted until it was broken up in the 1740s"**

Return to respectability

But smuggling cast a dark and dangerous shadow over Rye. The town's black-and-white half-timbered Mermaid Inn, founded in 1156 and rebuilt in 1420, and reputedly one of England's most haunted hotels, was the headquarters of the notorious smuggling fraternity the Hawkhurst Gang. Their illicit operations extended from Kent to Dorset, and the smugglers ruled the town in a reign of terror that lasted until the gang was broken up and its leaders executed in the 1740s.

After that violent interlude, Rye became respectable – and rich. By the early 20th century, its romantic charms were attracting the attention of a flock of writers and artists, including Henry James and EF Benson. They both lived in Lamb House, a handsome mansion (now managed by the National Trust) that had once given shelter to King George I when he was shipwrecked on a crossing from his native Hanover.

Henry James dictated his novels in a summer house in Lamb House's garden, which was destroyed by a stray German bomb in 1940. Conversely, Benson – who became Rye's mayor – satirised the town's curtain-twitching gentility in his Mapp and Lucia novel series. The painters Paul Nash and Edward Burra also lived in Rye, capturing its unique air in their surreal landscapes.

Although today Rye is cut off from the sea, with its harbour now a bird reserve, it still has strong nautical links. History here feels so close that on a dark winter night, it would not be so surprising to see a smuggler, keg on shoulder and pistol in hand, stealing around a corner, bound for mischief. H

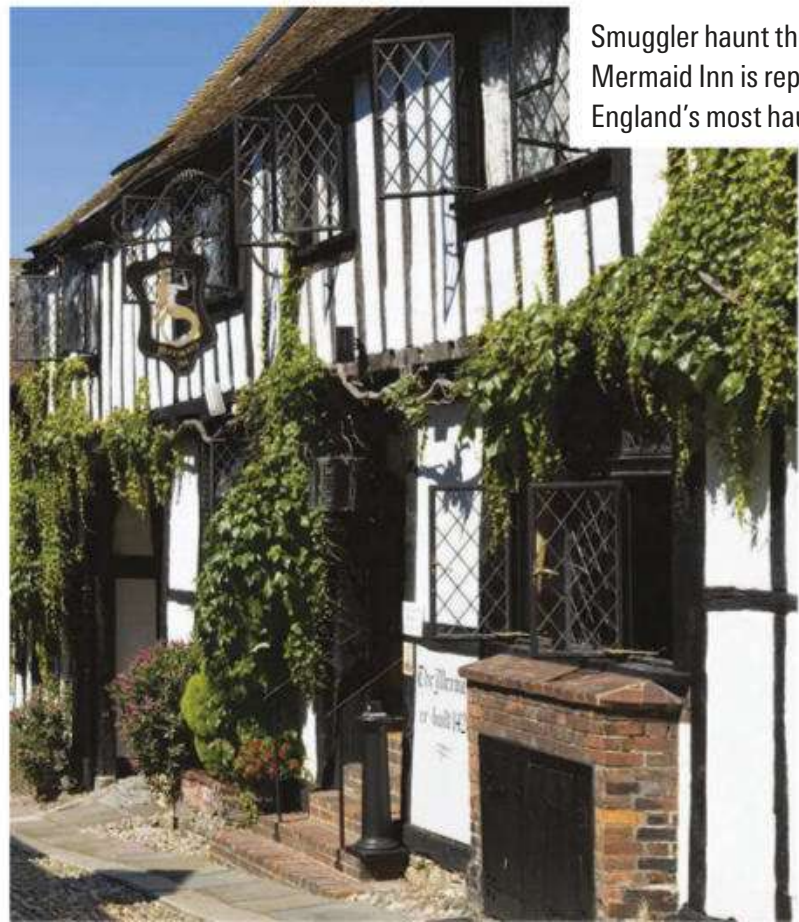
Nigel Jones is a journalist and biographer

VISIT For more information on planning a trip to Rye, go to **visit1066country.com/destinations/rye**

DREAMSTIME/BRIDGEMAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

Coastal defence
Ypres Tower, built in the 14th century as part of Rye's defences, later served as the town's jail. It now houses a fascinating museum of local history

LEFT: Lamb House, where novelists Henry James and EF Benson both lived
ABOVE: Edward Burra's *Landscape Near Rye* (c1943–45). Burra and his fellow artist Paul Nash also lived in Rye and captured its unique air in their paintings



Smuggler haunt the Mermaid Inn is reputedly England's most haunted hotel

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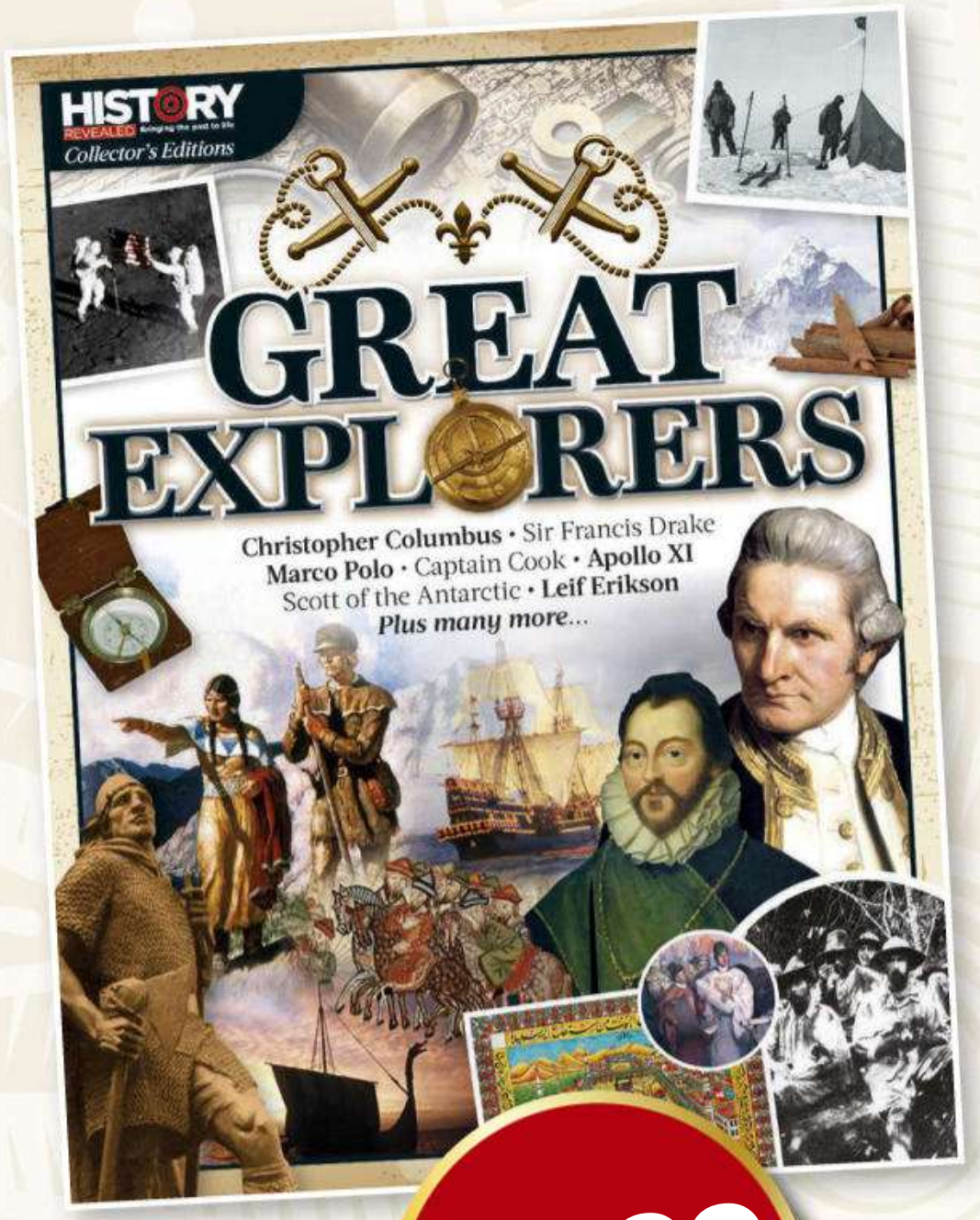
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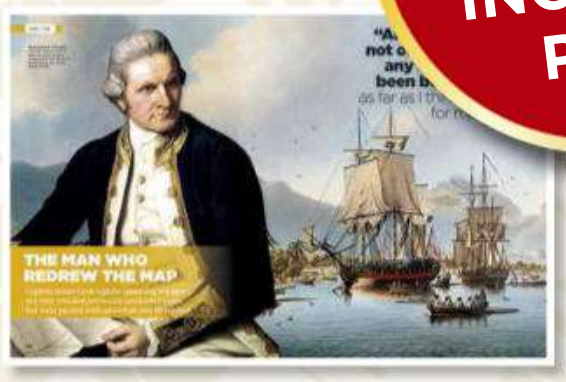

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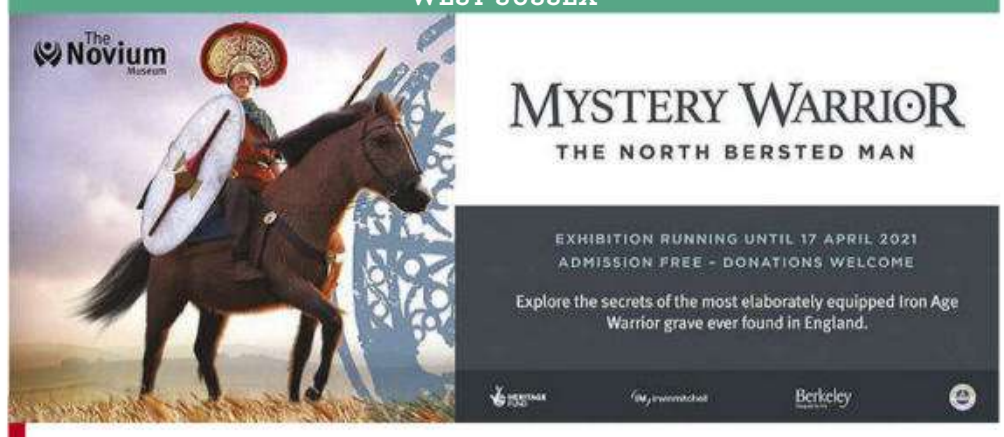
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01420 511275 // gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk

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02920 573070 // museum.wales/wool

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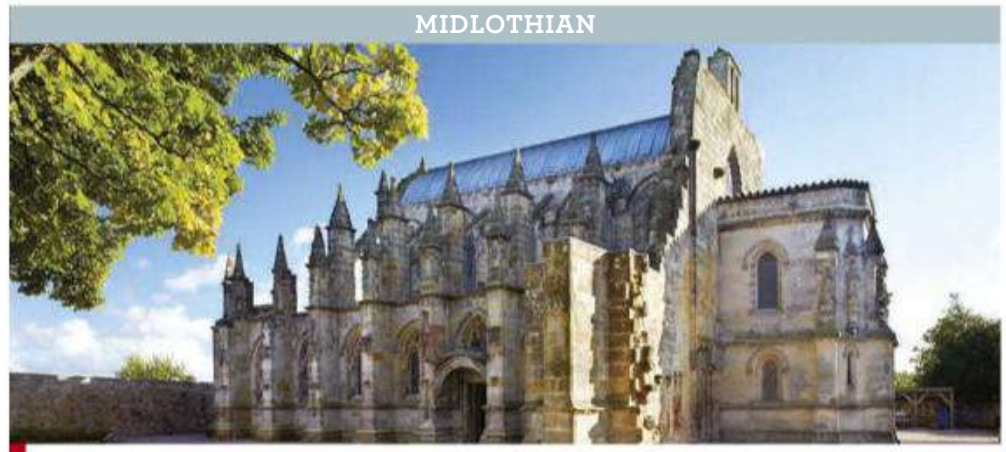

Rosslyn Chapel, near Edinburgh

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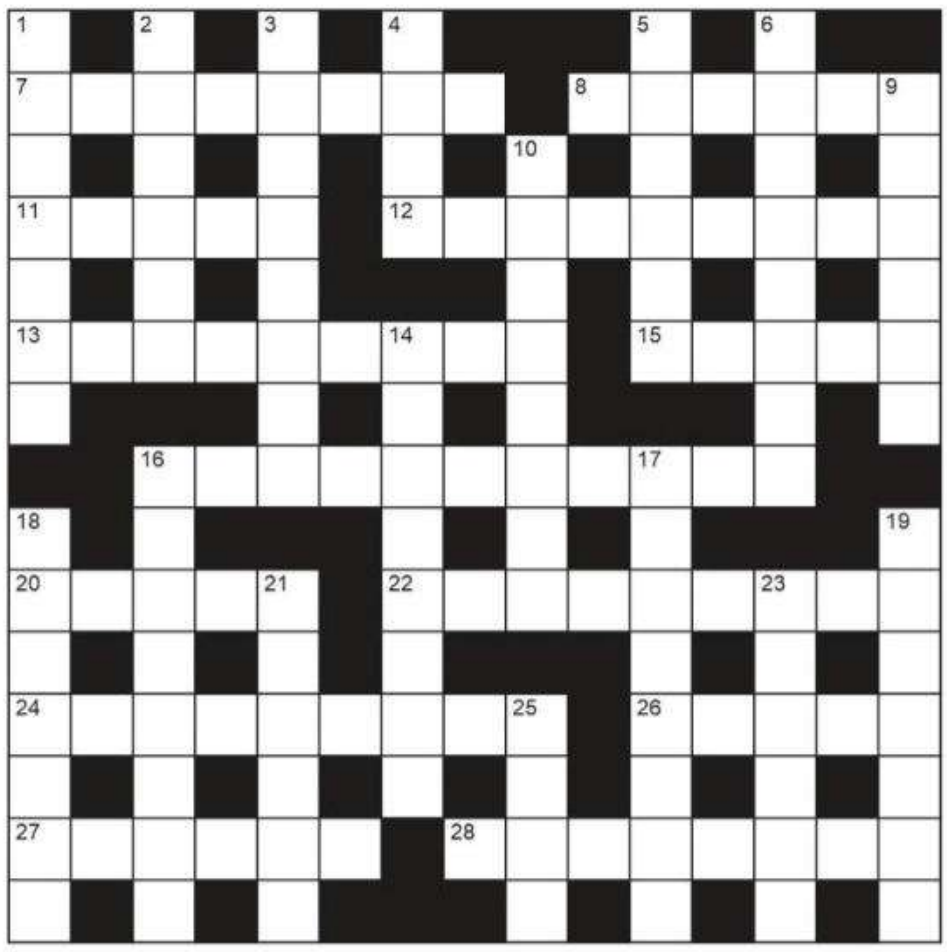

Across

7 This island, named 'bearded ones' by early European visitors, gained its independence, and Commonwealth status, on 30 November 1966 (8)
8 Martha ___, the choreographer who revolutionised dance in the United States and abroad, receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1976 (6)
11 An ethnic people (and their language) of eastern areas of India, numbering several million (5)
12 US filmmakers started arriving here in the early 20th century, to escape rules imposed by the Motion Picture Patents Company (9)
13 Also known as the New Stone Age (9)
15 An adherent (such as Emperor Marcus Aurelius) of the philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium in the third century BC (5)
16 Queen of the Brigantes tribe, who turned over the British resistance leader Caratacus to the Romans (11)
20 The Stonewall ___in New York in June/July 1969 were a reaction to police harassment of gay bars, which helped galvanise the gay rights movement (5)
22 Last name of twice-defeated US presidential candidate, who later became an ambassador to the UN (1961–65) (9)
24 This Danelaw administrative division, used in some English counties, was the equivalent of a 'hundred' (9)
26 Pierre___, leader of the Vichy government that collaborated with the Nazis, subsequently executed for treason (5)
27 Helen and Peter ___ were the false names of the Soviet spies living in a west London suburb until their arrest in 1961 (6)
28 The standing stones of ___, an archaeological site in Orkney (8)

Down

1 Remains of a Christian holy city, 30 miles south-west of Alexandria, built over the tomb of the martyr after which it is named (3,4)
2 European leader whose government was ostracised by the UN after the Second World War, not being admitted until 1955 (6)
3 The ___ poets, so-called because of their loyalty to Charles I during the Civil War, such as Lovelace and Herrick (8)
4 Member of the Germanic people who contributed greatly to the downfall of the western Roman empire (4)
5 Historic capital of Champagne, after which a unit of weight, used for precious metals, is believed to be named (6)
6 From humble beginnings she became Justinian I's wife, achieving great power and influence in the Byzantine world (8)
9 Bourgeois banking family who ruled Florence for several centuries (6)
10 President Kennedy announced the imposition of one on Cuba on 22 October 1962 (8)
14 Quintin Hogg, Viscount ___, who was the leader of the House of Lords when he renounced his peerage in November 1963 (8)
16 English 18th-century inventor of the revolutionary spinning mule, Samuel ___ (8)
17 A practice, taken up mainly by aristocrats seeking to settle a dispute or point of honour, that declined from the 19th century (8)
18 The Taino, a sub-group of these indigenous peoples of South America and the Caribbean, were the first people encountered by Columbus in the 'New World' (7)
19 Language taking its name from the Angles, a Germanic people arriving in early medieval times (7)
21 Margaret, founder of the movement for birth control (a term she is said to have originated) in the US in the early 20th century (6)
23 Term applied to the union of republics that formed the largest country, by area, in the world in the 20th century (6)
25 English artist, William, best known for his history paintings with nude figures, such as *Cleopatra's Arrival in Cilicia* (1821) (4)

Compiled by **Eddie James**

Who is this birth control pioneer? *(see 21 down)*

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Solution to our September 2020 crossword

Across 1 Great Fire 6 Otto 10 Dunbar 11/12 Gertrude Bell 13 Montessori 14 Rob Roy 19 Alfred 20 Aymara 22 HMS Belfast 25 Eros 26 Gold rush 27 Totems 28/16 Lord Haw-Haw 29 Anne Frank
Down: 2 Reuter 3 A J Balfour 4 Forum 5 Regency 7 Torcs 8 Omdurman 9/21 Greenham Common 15 Red Cloud 17 Worcester 18 Plimsoll 20 Aga Khan 23 Bader 24 Tithe

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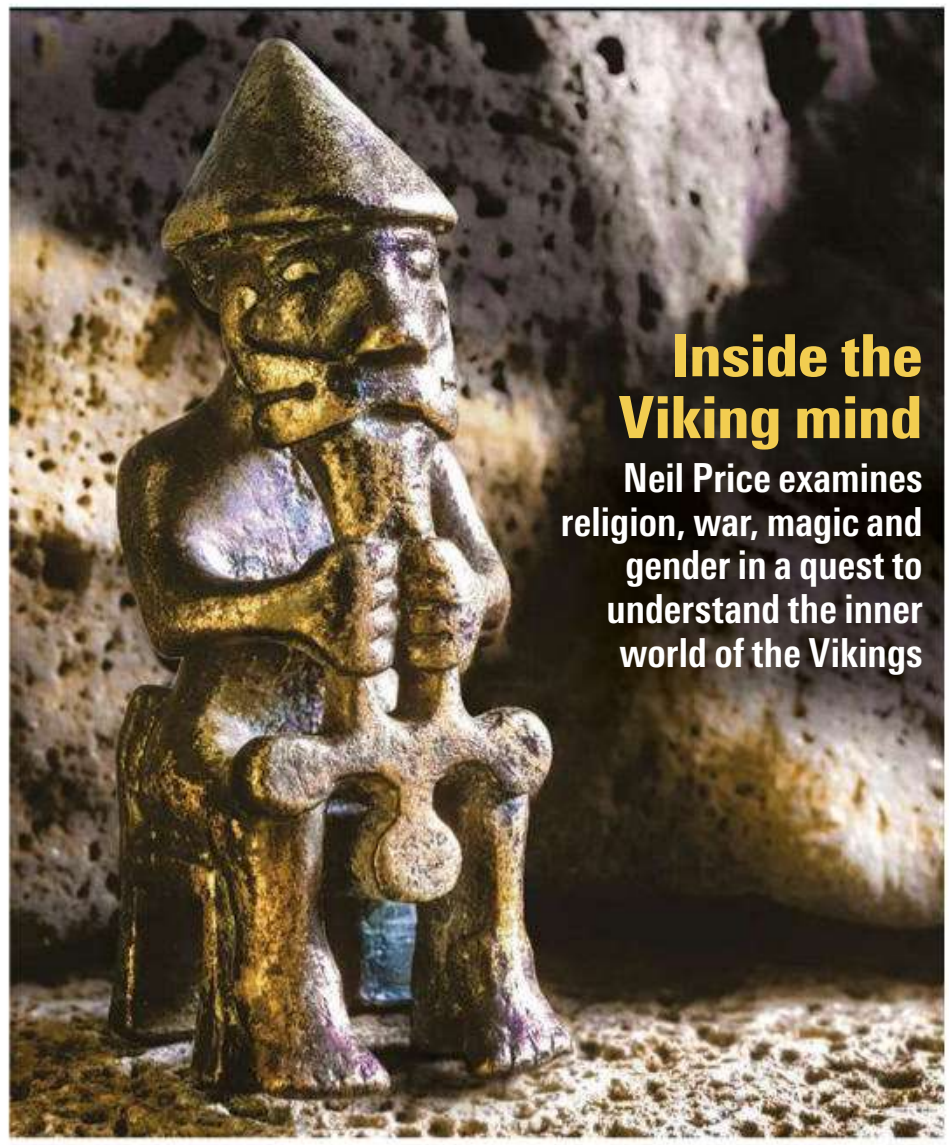

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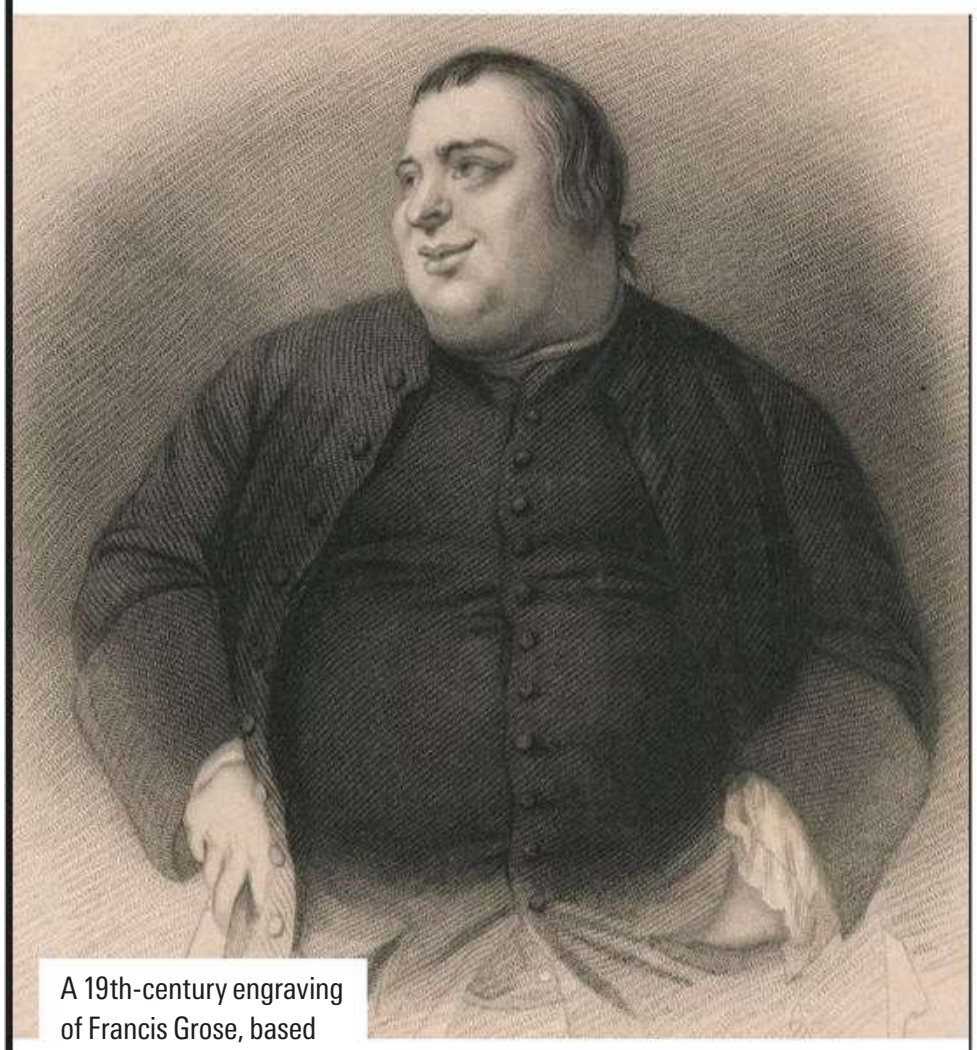
MY HISTORY HERO

Susie Dent, lexicographer and television presenter, chooses

Francis Grose

1731–91



A 19th-century engraving of Francis Grose, based on an earlier portrait. As a lexicographer, Grose recorded slang that his contemporaries shunned

IN PROFILE

Francis Grose was an antiquarian, lexicographer and draughtsman. Born in London, the eldest of seven, he began publishing a series of writings entitled *The Antiquities of England and Wales* in 1772, before going on to compile his famous *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785). The father of 10 died during a visit to Ireland, aged 59.

> For Grose, the language of the common people was as important as that of the literary heroes other dictionary compilers turned to

When did you first hear about Francis Grose?

Fairly late on, I confess. For many lexicographers, Samuel Johnson [1709–84] is the main man. His *Dictionary of the English Language* laid many of the foundations of modern lexicography, and it's a dictionary for the ages. It wasn't until I was preparing a talk for the Johnson Society that I also began to learn about Grose, a contemporary of Johnson who was similarly engaged in collecting words and their usage – but of a very different kind. While Johnson looked to the poets and great writers, Grose gathered his knowledge in brothels and gambling dens, taverns and slums. He was one of the earliest commentators on popular culture before the 20th century, so in many ways he was even more of a pioneer than Johnson.

What kind of man was he?

Grose was an ex-army captain who loved curios of architecture as well as language. He's still celebrated as a notable antiquary of the 18th century, and he loved to sketch – he produced the period's most extensive series of illustrations of ancient monuments. His personality, and physique, were huge: his friends joked he was Grose by name and gross in appearance. He was a champion drinker and a witty storyteller, who set off on his slang-gathering sprees at midnight, entertaining all wherever he went, but listening all the while, and recording the turns of phrase and jargon he overheard.

What made Grose a hero?

He opened up an entire underground language that other lexicographers had shunned. In many ways he threw down a gauntlet against the sanitised version of English that Johnson himself had set out to preserve. Grose would have none of such censorship and prudery: for him, the language of the common people was as important as that of the literary heroes other dictionary compilers turned to for 'their' version of English. Crucially, this was also a time when sections of society lived in terror of a French-style revolution, so it certainly took a lot of courage to prioritise the language and morals of the lower classes.

What would you ask Grose if you could meet him?

That's easy – I would love to know if he ever met Samuel Johnson. There is no record of the two men ever coming together, but they both loved fine wine and repartee, and I have a sense that – once Johnson had got over the shock of all those so-called 'low words' – they would have relished a good debate.

Finally, what's your own favourite word in Grose's dictionary?

It has to be 'betwattled', which means "to be surprised, confounded, and out of one's senses". H

Susie Dent was talking to York Membery

Susie Dent is the resident lexicographer and adjudicator on Channel 4's *Countdown*. Her new book, *Word Perfect: Etymological Entertainment for Every Day of the Year*, is published by John Murray on 1 October

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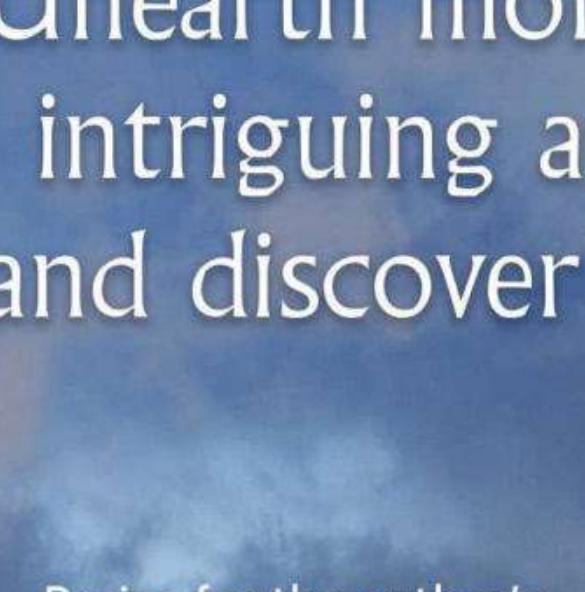

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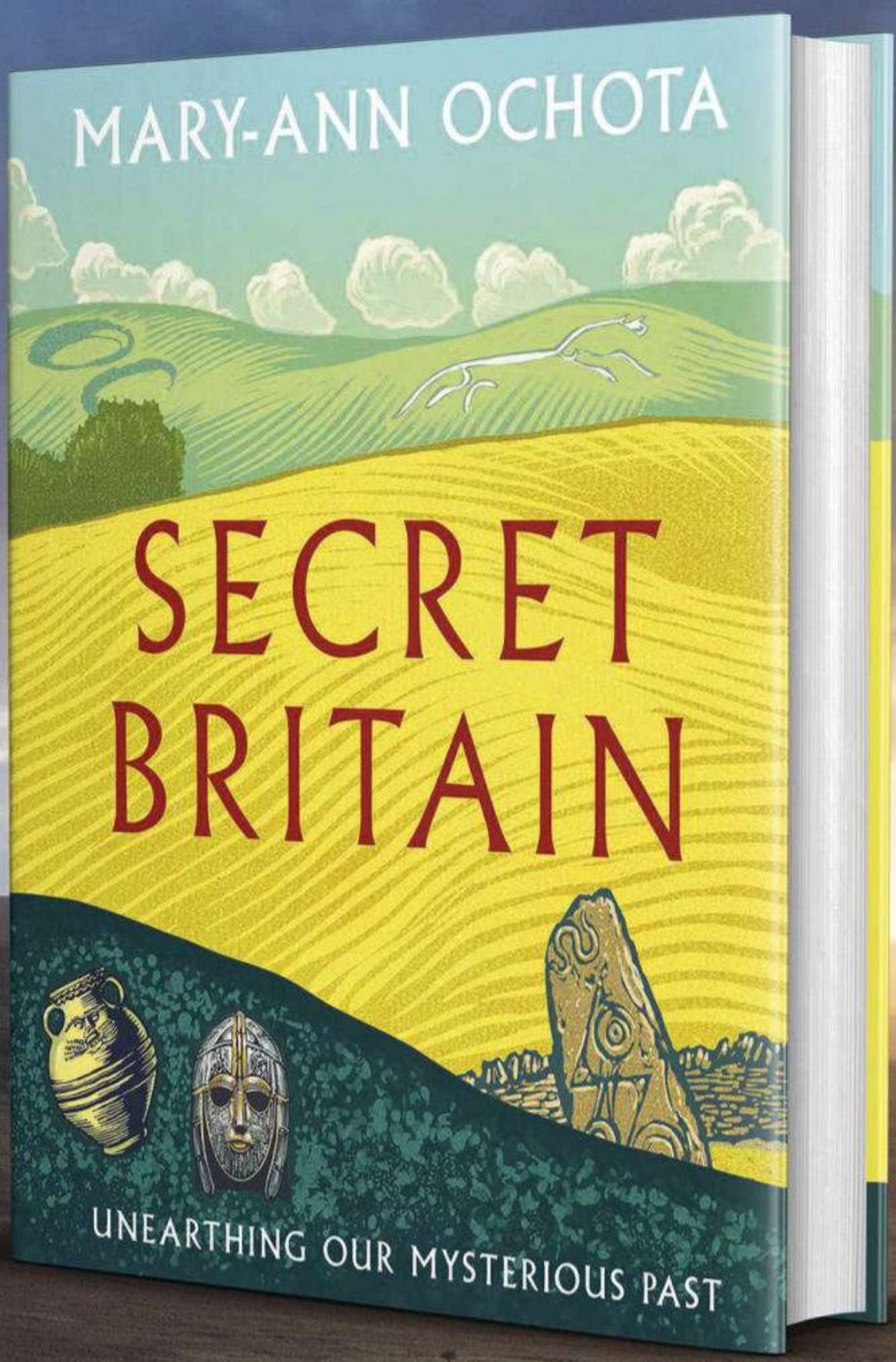

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